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## Advancing Women's Education in Bihar since Independence: Challenges and Progress

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**Abstract:** *This review paper examines the progress of women's education in Bihar, emphasizing the challenges posed by socio-cultural norms, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure, particularly for Dalit and rural women. Despite these barriers, government initiatives like the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana and National Education Policies have significantly improved literacy rates and enrollment. The study also explores the role of technology*

*and innovative methods in enhancing education while advocating for sustained efforts and community engagement to ensure inclusive and equitable educational opportunities, reinforcing education as a key driver of gender equality and social progress.*

**Keywords:** *Women's Education, Female Literacy, Government initiatives, Policy impact and socioeconomic barriers.*

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### Introduction:

Women's education is a cornerstone of socio-economic progress, significantly contributing to poverty reduction, economic growth, and overall societal well-being. Educated women actively participate in the workforce, improve household incomes, and make informed decisions regarding health, nutrition, and family planning, leading to lower maternal and child mortality rates (Duflo, 2012; Bhattacharya & Mukherjee, 2020). Furthermore, education empowers women to challenge traditional gender roles, advocate for their rights, and engage in community and political leadership, fostering greater gender equality (UNESCO, 2014). Despite these benefits, women's education in Bihar has historically been constrained by patriarchal norms, caste-based discrimination, and economic hardships. Although post-independence policies have improved literacy rates, challenges such as inadequate school infrastructure, a shortage of female teachers, and socio-cultural restrictions persist, particularly in rural areas (Chowdhury & Sanyal, 2015; Patnaik, 2017). Programs like the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana have successfully increased school enrollment, yet

disparities remain, highlighting the need for continued interventions (Bihar Government, 2018).

Since India's independence, the government has implemented several policies to enhance women's education, significantly increasing the female literacy rate from 8.86% in 1951 to over 70% in 2021. Initiatives such as the National Policy on Education (1986), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya have played a crucial role in improving access to education for girls, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. However, persistent challenges like early marriage, economic constraints, safety concerns, and inadequate school facilities continue to hinder progress (Kaul, 2020; Ministry of Education, 2021). While scholarship programs, reservations in higher education, and free or subsidized schooling have helped address these barriers, regional disparities between urban and rural areas remain significant. To ensure sustained progress in women's education, a multi-sectoral approach is necessary, incorporating financial incentives, improved infrastructure, and social awareness programs that challenge deep-rooted gender biases and encourage equal opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2022).

#### **Objectives:**

- To empower progress in the transformative growth of women's education in post-independent India.
- To evaluate the impact of government policies on women's education in Bihar.
- To identify the major challenges faced in promoting women's education.

#### **Hypothesis:**

- The empowerment of women through education has been a key driver in the transformative growth of women's education in post-independent India."
- Government policies have significantly influenced the advancement and accessibility of women's education in Bihar."
- "Various socio-cultural, economic, and institutional challenges hinder the effective promotion of women's education."

#### **Scope:**

This research investigates the evolving landscape of women's education in post-independent

India, particularly concentrating on the state of Bihar. It seeks to evaluate the efficiency and results of various government policies and initiatives designed to uplift women's education, analyzing their effects on improving literacy rates, accessibility to educational resources, and gender equality within the educational realm. The inquiry will rigorously assess the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers women confront in pursuing education, including patriarchal standards, poverty, early marriages, and restricted access to schools in rural regions. By examining these obstacles, the research aims to uncover the elements that hinder women's complete engagement in educational opportunities. Additionally, it will explore the contributions of non-governmental organizations, local communities, and the media in supporting or contesting these governmental initiatives. Ultimately, the research aspires to provide a thorough understanding of the advancements achieved, the remaining deficiencies, and strategic suggestions to further empower women through education, aiding their socio-economic growth in Bihar and beyond.

#### **Limitations:**

The study on government policies impacting women's education in Bihar has limitations, including reliance on secondary data, and restricting in-depth analysis. Its focus on Bihar limits broader generalizations, and it may not fully address intersectional challenges or rural barriers like traditional gender roles and economic constraints. Additionally, it may overlook non-governmental and community-driven educational initiatives. These limitations highlight the need for further research for a more comprehensive understanding of women's education in Bihar and beyond.

#### **Research Methodology:**

This research explores the evolving landscape of women's education in post-independent India, with a focus on Bihar. It evaluates the impact of government policies and initiatives on literacy rates, educational accessibility, and gender equality. The study critically examines socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers such as patriarchal norms, poverty, early marriage, and limited rural schooling. Additionally, it investigates the contributions of NGOs, local communities, and the media in either supporting or challenging these efforts. By identifying progress, challenges, and gaps, the research aims to propose strategic solutions to further empower

women through education, fostering their socio-economic advancement in Bihar and beyond.

The study has utilized a single-method strategy with qualitative data-gathering techniques to investigate the transformative progress of women's education in post-independent India, with an emphasis on Bihar. Quantitative information has been obtained through surveys and questionnaires aimed at women in both rural and urban settings, assessing the impact of government initiatives on women's education and recognizing significant obstacles. The examination has used descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data, which ensures a thorough understanding of the topic.

#### **Research Design:**

Research design refers to the overall strategy utilized to carry out research that defines a logical plan to tackle established research questions through the collection, interpretation, analysis, and discussion of data. It is a framework for choosing specific methods of data collection and data analysis.

**Research Area:** This study has been conducted in Patna Sadar, Danapur, and Phulwari Sharif.

**Universe:** Bihar is the third-largest state by population and the twelfth-largest by territory, with an area of 94,163 km<sup>2</sup>. Bihar borders Uttar Pradesh to its west, Nepal to the North, the northern part of West Bengal to the east, and Jharkhand to the South. The Bihar plain is split by the river Ganges, which flows from West to East. Bihar is also the world's fourth most populous sub-national entity.

Bihar covers a total area of 94,163 km<sup>2</sup> (36,357 sq mi), with an average elevation above sea level of 173 feet (53m). It is landlocked by Nepal in the North, Jharkhand in the South West Bengal in the east, and Uttar Pradesh to the West.

Patna historically known as Pataliputra, is the capital and largest city of the state of Bihar in India. According to the United Nations, as of 2018, Patna had a population of 2.35 million, making it the 19th largest city in India. Covering 250 square kilometers (97sq mi) and 2.5 million people, its urban agglomeration is the 18<sup>th</sup> largest in India. Patna serves as the seat of Patna High Court. The modern city of Patna is mainly on the southern bank of the river Ganges. The city also straddles the rivers Sone, Gandak, and Punpun. The city is approximately 35 kilometers (22 mi) in length.

#### **Sampling Selection:**

**Simple Random Sampling:** The research adopted simple random sampling to collect data from various socio-economic backgrounds, urban and rural locations, and different districts in Bihar.

#### **Sample Size:**

The sample size is defined as the number of observations used for determining the estimations of a given population. The size of the sample has been drawn from the population.

The researcher has used 200 samples for the research study.

#### **Tool for Data Collection:**

In research, an interview schedule is a list of questions that helps interviewers and researchers gather information on a specific topic. It helps to ensure that all relevant questions are asked and that the interview has been conducted smoothly.

The researcher has framed an interview schedule for the data collection.

#### **Source of Data:**

The researcher has used both primary and secondary methods to collect data.

**Primary Data:** The Primary data is the one, which will be collected directly from the respondents. The primary source of data has been collected from the respondents by using an interview schedule.

**Secondary Data:** The Secondary data is the data that is obtained from already collected data namely, books, journals, magazines, websites, in-house magazines, etc. Therefore, the researcher has collected the secondary data through books, journals, magazines, and websites.

**Period of Data Collection:** The researcher has taken almost three months to complete the data collection from the respondents.

#### **Review of Literature:**

##### **Neera Desai (2001) – Women's Education in India: The Promise and the Performance**

In her comprehensive analysis, Desai examines the progress of women's education in post-independence India, emphasizing the disparities between rural and urban education. She highlights that although there has been significant enrollment growth, deep-seated cultural and structural barriers have continued to hinder women's complete

educational empowerment, particularly in rural areas. Her work underscores the need for more inclusive policies to bridge the gaps.

**Sadhna Arya (2006) – Women, Gender Equality, and the State**

Arya's research focuses on the role of the state in promoting women's education. She critiques the government policies implemented post-independence, arguing that while many policies were forward-thinking, they lacked proper implementation. Arya also discusses how education for women became a critical tool for gender equality, yet patriarchal structures limited the actual empowerment of women in many regions.

**Asha Kapur Mehta (1996) – Education and Economic Empowerment: Women in India**

Mehta explores the relationship between education and economic empowerment among women in India. Her study finds that educated women are more likely to contribute to economic development, but the overall progress is hindered by traditional gender roles that prevent women from fully utilizing their education. She suggests a stronger focus on vocational and technical training as part of the educational reforms for women.

**Karuna Chanana (2004) – Globalization, Higher Education, and Gender: Changing Subject Choices of Indian Women Students**

Chanana's work explores the impact of globalization on higher education for women in India, particularly in post-independence times. She observes that women's participation in higher education has increased, but traditional gender roles influence their choice of subjects, often steering them toward fields like education and humanities rather than science and technology. Chanana calls for policy interventions to encourage women to enter diverse fields.

**Maitreyi Krishna Raj (2003) – From Oppression to Assertion: Women and Educational Reform in India**

Krishna Raj traces the historical trajectory of women's education in India from colonial times to the post-independence period. She argues that while education has been a powerful tool for social reform and empowerment, women still face systemic oppression that limits the full potential of educational progress. Her work discusses the role of women's

movements in pushing for educational reform and policy changes.

**Rekha Pande (2018) – The Journey of Women's Education in India: A Historical Perspective**

Pande's historical review of women's education in India highlights the progress made since independence but also focuses on the social and cultural challenges that have slowed down progress. Her study critically examines the caste and class dimensions of women's access to education, particularly the disadvantages faced by Dalit and tribal women. She calls for more intersectional approaches to education policy.

**Sharmila Rege (2013) – Dalit Women and the Politics of Gendered Education in India**

Rege's work brings attention to the intersectionality of caste and gender in women's education. She argues that Dalit women have faced dual discrimination in accessing education, both as women and as members of lower castes. Rege emphasizes the need for targeted educational policies that address these intersecting oppressions, alongside broader gender-based educational reforms.

**Vina Mazumdar (2010) – Education, Equality, and Development: Women in India's Changing Economy**

Mazumdar analyzes the link between education and the socio-economic development of women in India, showing how educational reforms post-independence have been a crucial factor in improving women's status. However, she notes that despite advancements, gender gaps remain significant in areas such as dropout rates, literacy, and access to higher education, particularly for women from marginalized communities.

**Gita Sen and Ayesha Ghosh (1998) – Gender and Education: An Analysis of Schooling and Work Participation in India**

Sen and Ghosh provide a detailed account of the participation of women in schooling and the workforce. They argue that despite the expansion of educational opportunities, women's participation in the workforce remains low, mainly due to the societal expectations that prioritize marriage and domestic roles. Their study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that integrates education with employment opportunities for women.

**Dreze, J., & Sen, A. (2013) – “An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions”**

Summary: Dreze and Sen analyze the socio-economic conditions in Bihar and emphasize how state policies impact educational outcomes, particularly for women. They argue that despite improvements in access, gender disparities in education remain due to deep-rooted social norms. The authors point out the role of public interventions like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) but stress the need for more targeted policies to address the specific challenges faced by women in education.

**Kumar, A. (2014) – “The Status of Women Education in Bihar: A Policy Perspective”**

Summary: Kumar explores various educational policies implemented by the government of Bihar and their direct impact on female literacy rates. He reviews initiatives like the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana and Mid-day Meal Scheme, highlighting significant improvements in school enrollments and attendance among girls, though dropout rates continue to be high due to socio-economic challenges.

**Sharma, M. (2017) – “Gender Disparities in Education in Bihar: Assessing Government Policy Interventions”**

Summary: This paper examines the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls in Bihar, despite various governmental initiatives. Sharma focuses on the impact of scholarships, free uniforms, and cycles, which have led to increased enrollment of girls in secondary education. However, the study points out the persistence of issues like early marriage and lack of infrastructure that hinder educational continuity for women.

A gap in the literature on women's education in India lies in the absence of region-specific studies, particularly regarding the intersection of gender, caste, and education policies in states like Bihar. While some authors explore caste and gender issues in education, most of the analysis remains generalized across India, without addressing Bihar's unique socio-political challenges. Additionally, the literature often overlooks how regional governance impacts the effectiveness of specific educational policies for women. This gap highlights the need for further research on how Bihar's sociocultural context and policy implementation affect the educational outcomes of marginalized women.

**Historical Context:**

At the point of India's independence in 1947, the education framework was predominantly influenced by British colonial governance, aimed at cultivating a small elite proficient in English and Western disciplines. Literacy levels were remarkably low, hovering around 12-14%, with notable inequalities between urban and rural regions, as well as between genders and castes. Education was primarily unavailable to women, Dalits, and rural communities, while formal education was centered in urban locales. Although esteemed institutions were present in major cities, most of the population had limited or no educational opportunities. Nationalist figures such as Mahatma Gandhi advocated for an educational vision that was practical, inclusive, and applicable to rural India, pushing for a system capable of empowering all segments of society. After independence, the government emphasized the expansion of education, striving for universal literacy and schooling access for everyone, especially through constitutional measures and reforms.

Now of India's independence in 1947, the educational framework was marked by a heritage of colonial impact, wherein the British instituted a structure that mainly benefited the elite and administrative demands of the empire, leaving much of the populace without educational opportunities (Chandra, 2008). Literacy levels were remarkably low, approximated at about 12-14%, and educational access was extremely disparate, with rural regions and marginalized communities, especially women and Dalits, being predominantly left out (Ghosh, 2010). The educational framework was largely reliant on English and Western syllabi, perpetuating a separation between the educated urban elite and the uneducated rural populace (Kumar, 2011). Although establishments like the University of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras were in operation, they predominantly served the higher social classes in urban locales (Sarkar, 2007). Nationalist figures like Mahatma Gandhi pushed for a more inclusive and practical educational model that addressed rural necessities and fostered self-sufficiency (Gandhi, 1945). Following independence, the government initiated measures to broaden educational access, especially through the enactment of the Constitution, which established provisions for free and compulsory education (Govt. of India, 1950).

During the pre-independence period, educational gender inequalities were pronounced, with girls experiencing restricted access to formal schooling, particularly in colonial India. The education of girls was mainly regarded as unnecessary, as customary roles restricted them to household responsibilities and care giving. The colonial education framework, primarily crafted to fulfill the requirements of the British Empire, frequently omitted girls from its purview (Kumar, 2014). Although there were some efforts aimed at educating girls, such as the initiatives by reformers like Jyotirao Phule and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, these initiatives mostly remained localized and encountered substantial societal pushback (Desai, 2010). While boys from higher social strata had more extensive access to formal education in government-operated schools, girls were generally educated at home or in religious establishments, where the curriculum was restricted (Bhattacharya, 2018). Moreover, caste and class considerations further exacerbated the obstacles for girls, as marginalized groups had even fewer educational opportunities (Pandey, 2016). This entrenched gender prejudice in education solidified wider social inequities and impeded women's advancement in public and economic spheres, a legacy that continued into post-independence India.

#### **Government Initiatives and Policies:**

##### **National Policies on Education (1968, 1986, 1992, and NEP 2020)**

**1968's National Policy on Education:** The 1968 National Policy on Education marked a pivotal moment in the restructuring of India's educational framework. It highlighted the importance of broadening educational opportunities, particularly by addressing differences based on regions and gender. The policy aimed to enhance the quality of education, encourage the incorporation of regional languages in primary schooling, and launch adult literacy initiatives. It further underscored the importance of vocational education.

**The National Policy on Education was laid out in the year 1986:** The 1986 National Policy on Education, later updated in 1992, brought about a more holistic perspective by emphasizing the enhancement of education across every level. Its objective was to promote inclusivity in education by implementing policies that support the education of girls, SC/ST, and marginalized communities. The policy suggested implementing a 10+2+3 structure

with a focus on the inclusion of vocational education. It also aimed at enhancing the quality of teacher training and laying the groundwork for the subsequent enactment of the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

**The National Education Policy of 2020:** The objective of the NEP 2020 is to transform the education system in India through its emphasis on multidisciplinary learning, adaptable curricula, and early childhood care and education (ECCE). It underscores the significance of acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills by the third grade, along with emphasizing vocational education starting from secondary school. The National Education Policy advocates for the empowerment of marginalized communities and the preservation of Indian languages. The policy further advocates for enhanced investment in education and improved incorporation of technology.

#### **Bihar-Specific Schemes:**

**Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana:** The Bihar government has introduced an initiative to support girls by furnishing them with bicycles for easier transportation to school, as a means of empowerment. It provides support to girls in classes 9 to 12, breaking down barriers related to distance and promoting increased enrollment and retention rates. This program has effectively enhanced school attendance and decreased the rate of dropouts among teenage girls residing in rural regions. Bihar Sharif Model Schools and Scholarships offer unique educational opportunities.

**Bihar Sharif Model Schools and Scholarships:** The Bihar government has also implemented model schools and scholarships to promote enrollment and retention, especially among disadvantaged communities. The introduction of these programs has led to an increase in the number of students enrolling and improvements in academic performance.

#### **Impact of Policies on Enrollment, Retention, and Literacy Rates:**

**Enrollment and Retention:** The National Policies on Education, specifically the editions from 1986 and 1992, in addition to the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana, have notably boosted enrollment figures, especially for girls and marginalized communities in Bihar. The NEP 2020 aims to enhance retention rates by ensuring fair

access to quality education, particularly through addressing fundamental literacy and Numeracy challenges

**Rates of Literacy:** Bihar's literacy rates have been on a steady incline, especially following the implementation of the RTE Act in 2009, which emphasized the importance of compulsory education. Nevertheless, Bihar continues to fall behind other states in terms of literacy rates. Based on the 2011 Census data, Bihar had a literacy rate of 63.82%; however, recent reports indicate a steady improvement in education levels in both urban and rural regions.

**Success Stories and Areas Requiring Improvement:** The Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana has effectively increased school attendance for girls in rural Bihar, contributing to a decrease in dropout rates. Bihar has shown significant improvement in primary education enrollment, as a greater number of children are now able to attend school, thanks to a range of initiatives by the state and central governments. Initiatives such as Mid-Day Meals have significantly contributed to enhancing the rates of enrollment retention, and attendance.

**Areas in need of improvement:** Although Bihar has experienced successes, it still confronts obstacles like inadequate infrastructure, subpar teacher quality, and high dropout rates, particularly in secondary education. Improving the quality of education continues to be a pressing concern, and the state must prioritize strengthening teacher training and ensuring high-quality education is delivered across all levels.

**Challenges in Advancing Women's Education:** In Bihar, social and cultural obstacles persist in hindering women's access to education. Patriarchal customs emphasize boys' education over that of girls, as girls are frequently regarded as future caregivers for their husbands' families, restricting the perceived importance of their education (Mehta, 2024; Kumar, 2024). Early marriages, which are common in the area, also hinder girls' education by redirecting their duties toward household roles (Singh and Kumar, 2024). Moreover, poverty intensifies these obstacles, as numerous families cannot afford to send their daughters to school, especially in rural regions, where the infrastructure and resources are often insufficient (Dreze and Sen, 2013). The dowry system further complicates this situation, redirecting

family resources away from girls' education to meet marriage-related costs (ResearchGate, 2024). These elements contribute to a vicious cycle, where low literacy rates among women limit economic prospects, sustaining gender inequality and societal disparities (Kumar, 2024; ResearchGate, 2024). Addressing these challenges necessitates holistic social reform, coupled with initiatives to enhance educational infrastructure and promote awareness regarding the significance of girls' education (Singh and Kumar, 2024).

Advancing women's education encounters substantial obstacles rooted in socio-cultural, economic, and institutional challenges. Patriarchal customs frequently give preference to male education, resulting in early marriage for girls, which restricts their chances for schooling and personal growth (Kabeer, 2017). Gender roles further bolster the notion that women's foremost duty lies within the household, thereby constricting their educational opportunities (Unterhalter, 2014). From an economic perspective, poverty constitutes a significant hindrance, as families in economically disadvantaged situations may lack the means to pay for school fees or transportation, while insufficient infrastructure, such as the absence of schools or adequate facilities, intensifies the issue (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, institutional shortcomings including a deficit of schools and female educators, particularly in rural regions, exacerbate the problem, making it challenging for girls to attend or remain in school (Herz and Sperling, 2004). Unsafe school conditions and the looming threat of violence or harassment further deter many girls from pursuing education (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Additionally, intersectional obstacles experienced by Dalit and marginalized communities worsen the predicament, with biased practices and restricted access to quality education frequently pushing these groups to the fringes (Desai, 2018). These intertwined factors create a complicated network that obstructs the advancement of women's education on a global scale.

**Progress Achieved:** Following India's independence, there has been notable advancement in the improvement of female literacy rates, especially in Bihar, a state known for its historical

social, and economic obstacles. The rate of literacy among women has shown a gradual rise across the decades, climbing from 15. 3% in 1951 to 63. 9% in 2011, indicating a favorable progression towards gender equality in education as per the Census of India, 2011. Several government initiatives, including the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme and mid-day meal programs, have contributed to this improvement by focusing on promoting girls' school attendance.

Bihar has witnessed a significant rise in female enrollment at primary and secondary levels in schools and colleges. As reported by the Ministry of Education, the percentage of girls enrolled in elementary education in Bihar has shown a steady rise, climbing from 43. 3% in 2001 to 49. 4% in 2021, as per the Department of School Education and Literacy, Government of India. Moreover, there is a growing trend of increased enrollment of girls in colleges and universities, notably in fields like engineering, medicine, and law, which have historically been male-dominated.

Bihar has been home to several accomplished women leaders and professionals who have effectively shattered age-old barriers. Prominent individuals like Sushila K stand out for their remarkable achievements. Shabnam Hashmi, an activist, Neelam Pradhan, an educationist, along with the first woman IAS officer from Bihar, serve as inspirations to numerous individuals. Their accomplishments emphasize the powerful impact of education and empowerment in surpassing socio-cultural limitations.

Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups have been instrumental in supporting government initiatives to enhance women's education. Groups such as Prerana and the Bihar Voluntary Health Association have put in relentless efforts to enhance literacy rates, particularly in rural regions, by conducting awareness campaigns, skill development initiatives, and direct educational interventions. They have dedicated their efforts to tackling concerns like child marriage, early pregnancies, and limited access to quality education, thereby empowering women to live more enriching lives.

## Result:

**Table 1. Age-wise distribution of the respondents**

Age of Respondents	No of Respondents	Percentage
Under 20	5	2.5
21-30	108	54
31-40	54	27
41-50	33	16.5
Total	200	100

The above table depicts that many women (54%) belong to 21-30 years whereas the last group of women under 20 is 2.5%.

**Table 2. Educational background of respondents**

Education	No of Respondents	Percentage
Primary	29	14.5
Secondary	39	19.5
Undergraduate	105	52.5
Post Graduate	27	13.5
Total	200	100

The above table depicts that most women (52.5%) are undergraduates whereas only (13.5%) are have studied postgraduation.

**Table 3. Barrier's women face in accessing education**

Barrier	No of Respondents	Percentage
Financial Constraints	70	35
Cultural Norms	10	5
Lack of Nearby School	67	33.5
Family Responsibility	53	26.5
Total	200	100

The above table depicts that most women (35%) face **Financial Constraints** whereas (5%) face barriers in education due to **Cultural Norms**.

**Table 4. Awareness about initiatives & policies provided by the Government**

Policy & Initiatives	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	173	86.5
No	27	13.5
Total	200	100

The above table depicts that (86.5%) of women are aware of the policies and initiatives provided by the government whereas (13.5) % are unaware.

### Major Findings:

The study found that most women pursuing education were young, with a majority opting for undergraduate studies and fewer for postgraduate education. Mental status played a crucial role in women's education. Most women were married and lived in nuclear families, with few in joint families. A large portion belonged to lower-income groups. The women's literacy rate increased significantly from 1951 to 2022, but unemployment remained high.

Many women were aware of government initiatives like the Mukhyamantri Udhyan Yojana, but fewer knew about the Bihar State Education Project Council. Economic barriers, financial constraints, distant schools, family responsibilities, and cultural stereotypes were major challenges to education, with early marriage being a primary obstacle to higher education.

Financial support, scholarships, and improved infrastructure were seen as essential for enhancing women's educational opportunities in the future.

### Recommendation:

Strengthen Existing Schemes and Create New Ones: Policymakers ought to concentrate on improving existing welfare initiatives directed at marginalized groups, guaranteeing enhanced accessibility, and aiming efforts at those requiring assistance the most. Additional programs may be established to tackle arising needs and voids, particularly for groups experiencing social exclusion due to caste, gender, or economic conditions.

Community-Driven Solutions: Involving local stakeholders—such as community leaders, organizations, and families—in the creation and execution of solutions can effectively confront detrimental cultural norms. Empowering the community guarantees that interventions are relevant to the context and are more likely to succeed in facilitating sustainable social transformation.

Integration of Technology and Vocational Training into Education: Merging digital proficiency and vocational skills into educational programs assists in equipping marginalized groups with the resources for economic advancement. This integration can boost employability, expand access to

information, and diminish obstacles to education and career paths, ultimately promoting greater socio-economic inclusion.

### Conclusion:

The study highlights progress in women's education in Bihar, particularly in rural areas, but persistent challenges remain due to socio-economic barriers, cultural norms, and inadequate infrastructure. Early marriages, domestic responsibilities, and a lack of female leadership limit opportunities, with rural and disadvantaged groups facing the greatest obstacles. While government initiatives exist, their execution is often ineffective, especially in remote areas. A holistic approach is needed, including awareness campaigns, improved infrastructure, targeted policies, and community partnerships. The ultimate goal is to ensure equal access to quality education, empowering women to contribute to socio-economic development and break cycles of poverty and marginalization.

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