

# EXPLORING GENDER EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT IN EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF NAGALAND

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## ABSTRACT

The present study explores the undercurrents of gender equity and empowerment within educational institutions. Education is regarded as the most pivotal tool for the all-round development of individuals. Gender discrimination, especially in education, is prevalent in the world over. This study tries to understand the barriers and facilitators influencing gender parity and the empowerment of girls and women in educational settings. The study will seek to identify the factors that hinder gender equity in Nagaland, India, such as enrolment, retention, curriculum, and the impact of socio-cultural factors. There has been significant progress in the education of girls and women, but disparities persist, especially in marginalised communities. Several factors, such as poverty, sociocultural norms, infrastructure, and curriculum, continue to impede the educational advancement of women. The paper explores the necessity of a multi-faceted approach that addresses these challenges. The study presents a way forward for policy makers and stakeholders to promote gender equity and empower girls and women through education in Nagaland and the country. The present paper also tries to understand why women have little say in decision-making, political participation, and administration despite being well-educated.

**Keywords:** Gender Equity, Gender Discrimination, Empowerment, Sociocultural Factors, Marginalisation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender is usually referred to as the socially constructed roles and responsibilities designated for men and women. Gender disparity is an ancient and global phenomenon that has caused barricades in every society—gender equity couriers' fair treatment and opportunities for all individuals. Gender equity does not mean men and women are the same, but it refers to equal opportunities and chances. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment of prospects, resources, and rewards with equal partnership sharing between genders. Different genders may need other resources to accomplish a fair outcome; gender equity acknowledges these various needs and works to address these specific encounters, thus creating a level playing field for everyone. Gender equity focuses on providing equal access to quality education for all genders. It safeguards equal opportunities in the workforce, such as fair wages and support for women in entrepreneurship and leadership roles and positions. Gender equity is about the involvement of all genders in the decision-making process, ensuring health care, and creating a safe environment free from violence and manipulation.

Gender equity addresses social norms such as discriminating attitudes and practices by challenging and changing them and creating a more equitable society where individual scan fulfil their potential and contribute to society.

Education empowerment involves students, teachers, and communities, equipping them with the necessary skills, opportunities, and resources. Its absorption creates an environment where an individual is confident, capable of making decisions independently, and has the knowledge to solve problems. An essential component of women's empowerment and societal progress is through education. Education aims to achieve active learning, critical thinking, and self-efficacy and tries to empower teachers with professional development and autonomy in teaching. In the field of knowledge, parents and local communities should be engaged in the educational process by creating a supportive environment, ensuring all learners have access to the necessary resources to promote inclusion in education. In this way, education should pave the way for an equitable society by empowering everyone.

## **1.1. METHODOLOGY**

The present study is qualitative and virtuously based on data collected from secondary sources such as books, research articles, journals, and newspapers. It is also based on reviews collected from various sources on factors contributing to gender inequity in education, administration, and decision-making, teachers' role in promoting gender equity, and measures to bring gender equity into education.

## **1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- 1) To study the various factors contributing to gender inequity in Nagaland.
- 2) To suggest measures that can help to bring gender equity in Nagaland.
- 3) To study the impact of education on women's empowerment.

## **1.3. GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION**

Gender equity in education is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of fostering social empowerment and advancing toward an inclusive society by ensuring fair treatment and prospects for all genders. It aims to end discrimination against women and girls. Gender equity lays the importance of the effective participation of women in the decision-making process and leadership. Education is a pillar of progress and human development, and it entails ensuring fair and equal treatment of every individual in all aspects of the educational process. It is vivacious in nurturing inclusive societies and achieving sustainability. Kuteesa et al. (2024). Gender equity aims to ensure all genders have equal access to educational opportunities. It tries to address the economic constraints and cultural norms prevalent in society that cause gender disparity. Gender equity in education aims to develop a curriculum free from biases and stereotyped perspectives. It tries to create a safe, supportive, and conducive environment for learners by addressing gender-based issues and equipping teachers with training and awareness in areas that cause gender biases in education. Gender equity ensures academic achievement and access to further education and employment, irrespective of gender. Gender equity in education challenges traditional gender roles. Gender equity in education is key to empowerment by providing knowledge, skills, and confidence, especially for girls. It helps in economic development and ensures that every individual has the opportunity to reach their potential through skill development, innovation, and productivity. It tries to create a system where learners can access quality education, participate in the learning process freely, and achieve equitable outcomes.

## **1.4. EMPOWERMENT IN EDUCATION**

The process of authorising or aiding an individual to think, decide, and control work autonomously can be termed empowerment. Empowerment also means liberation from any bondage. Education awakens people from the bondage of darkness by empowering women in their socio-cultural, economic, interpersonal, legal, and psychological domains. Education helps to achieve sustainability and achieve national development. Jayswal & Saha, (2023).

When equipped with knowledge, skills, and confidence, individuals can make informed decisions by actively participating in society. Education is the most potent tool for empowerment. Education enables people to contribute to their communities and society by enabling them to realise their potential. Education fosters critical thinking by enabling

learners to understand the world around them by making informed decisions and questioning unjust practices or social norms, making them aware of their rights and responsibilities. It provides the necessary skills for livelihood, boosts self-efficacy, develops leadership qualities in learners, challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes, and helps to promote gender equality by reducing gender-related violence. Empowerment through education fosters learners' personal growth and self-realisation.

## 1.5. GENDER EQUITY IN NAGALAND

Nagaland, a state in North-East India, fares much better than other Indian states as it reports less domestic violence and crimes against women. Naga women are highly respected because of their arduousness. Naga women are educated, and the Naga society is generally safe for women because the traditional Naga society gives utmost importance to women's safety. Dowry is not practised among the tribes of Nagaland. Naga women are well-educated and enjoy more privileges than most other women in other parts of India. Women in Nagaland enjoy more privileges than women in other states. However, there is a history hidden within the patriarchal Naga society. Nagaland, like any other Indian society, is deeply patriarchal and traditional, which often puts men in charge in most areas of life. Naga women, despite being educated, have little decision-making power and hereditary rights, and women's participation in administrative and other decision-making positions is dismal. The traditional tribal organisations and customary courts in the Naga society are interpreted from a patriarchal mindset and function as the administrative authority in the state. Conventional organizations/courts enjoy a degree of influence not found in other parts of the country except a few states in the northeastern part of India. Naga women are frowned upon when they come together to fight for gender equality and status for not following the conservative societal rules. Women are debarred from performing traditional religious rites. The majority of Naga women do not inherit/own landed property. The literacy rate of the females of Nagaland is above the national average, but Nagaland is far behind those of developed countries. Arbitration is required for Naga women in employment generation, administration, higher education for women's development, etc. Despite being educated, equality and freedom for women in the Naga society have remained the prerogative of a few. Respect without freedom is valueless, and the empowerment of Naga women is looked at sceptically because education without decision-making power is unsubstantiated. Gender equity cannot be measured in terms of security or respect. Gender equity is possible when there is fair treatment among all genders. Gender equity does not demand men and women to be the same but to get equal opportunities and resources in life.

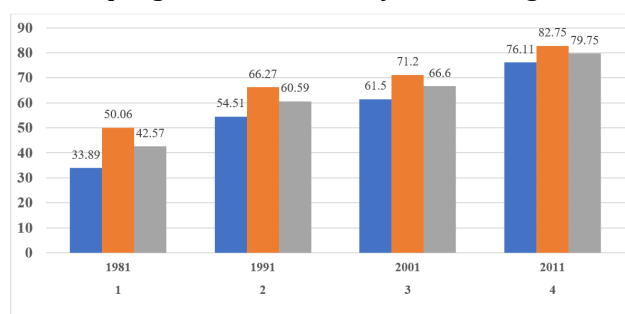
Table No 1: Status of Literates to Total Population in Nagaland

Sl.No	Year	Female	Male	Total
1	1981	33.89	50.06	42.57
2	1991	54.51	66.27	60.59
3	2001	61.50	71.20	66.60
4	2011	76.11	82.75	79.75

\*1991: Calculated from ST population

\* Source: Director Census Operation, Nagaland, Kohima

The above table shows the gender-wise progress of the literacy rate in Nagaland.



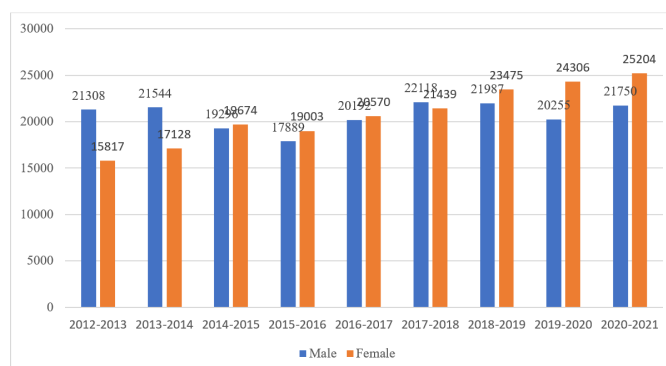
**Figure 1** Gender-wise progress of literacy Rate in Nagaland from 1981 to 2011 Census.

**Source** All India Survey on Higher Education (Various Years) Union Ministry of Education, Government of India

Table 2 Gross Enrolment in HEIs in Nagaland 2020-2021

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
2012-2013	21308	15817	37125
2013-2014	21544	17128	38672
2014-2015	19296	19674	38970
2015-2016	17889	19003	36892
2016-2017	20192	20570	40762
2017-2018	22118	21439	43557
2018-2019	21987	23475	45462
2019-2020	20255	24306	44561
2020-2021	21750	25204	46954

Source The MorungExpress, Friday,10th May 2024 (Express, 2024)



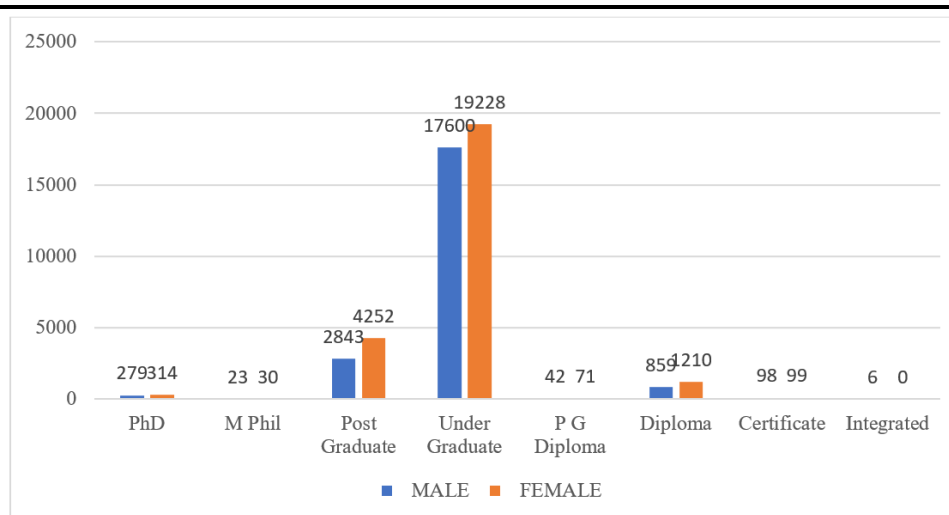
**Figure 2** Enrolment Ratio of Male and Females in Higher Education in Nagaland.

The above figure shows the enrolment ratio of males/females in higher Education in Nagaland.

**Table 3** Enrollment of Students at different levels in Higher Education

EDUCATION LEVEL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
PhD	279	314	593
M Phil	23	30	53
Post Graduate	2843	4252	7095
Under Graduate	17600	19228	36828
P G Diploma	42	71	113
Diploma	859	1210	2069
Certificate	98	99	197
Integrated	06	00	06

Source The MorungExpress, Friday,10th May 2024(Express, 2024)



**Figure 3** Enrolment Status of Students in Higher Education in Nagaland

**Source** The MorungExpress, Friday,10th May 2024 (Express, 2024)

The figure shows the enrollment of Students at different levelsof Higher Education, which shows that women are also making good progressin the field of Higher Education

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Few studies on related literature reveal that women, in general, still face many challenges, and Naga women, in particular, have a long way to go regarding equity and equality.

Amer (2013) attempted to study the Political Status of women in Nagaland. The study found that the age-old patriarchy in Nagaland controls new and old institutions of Nagaland despite the introduction of modern governance in the political system of Nagaland. The study found that political parties in Nagaland are intensely male-dominated, and within the party, there is a gendered division of labour. Women's role is restricted to supporting the parties by casting votes and cooking meals for the party events. The study further found that political parties refrain women from supporting and promoting women in politics. Women are only viewed as equal but not held equal. The study found that men only dictate, whereas women do not receive positive societal reinforcement to upgrade themselves. Gender equality remains a challenge.

Nayal (2022) attempted to study Gender Inequality and Its Causes and Types. The study found that despite progress and development, women in India still face discrimination based on their gender, as it used to be. Women are not given the power of decision-making at home and in the workplace. Lack of education is a factor; other factors, such as social customs, beliefs, and the patriarchal system, cause discrepancies in women.

Putcha, Elamadurthi, Matsaniya, and Koyye (2023) attempted to study the challenges of Women in Accessing Higher Education in India. The study examines the various challenges Indian women face in their journey to get an education. The study found sociocultural norms, economic barriers, safety concerns in the educational environments and institutional policy and challenges, and lack of gender-sensitive policies cause inadequate representation of women in leadership roles in academia. The study further found the lack of support is also a cause of the underrepresentation of women.

Yanthan (2023) attempted to study the Gendered Practice of Naga Customary Laws: A Critical Analysis. The study reveals that the Naga customary law, which is believed to bind the Naga community, is not conducive to the gender rights of Naga women because customary law has always been male-centric, with discriminatory practices posing a significant threat to the progress of women in the society despite of the Indian constitution guarantee equality. The study reveals that gendered polarisation exists in many places. Naga women are subjected to dual discrimination, one through a patriarchal system and the other through stringent customary law. The study further reveals that Naga society has evolved by adopting new governance under the Indian democratic principle but has failed to adhere to gender equality

on many counts. The study further suggests intervention to minimise the disparity of power between traditional leaders and women, re-interpret customary law, and evolve with the changing times for the development of Naga women and Naga society as a whole.

Kuteesa, Apuokwe, and Udeh (2024) attempted to study Gender Equity in Education: Addressing Challenges And Promoting Opportunities for Social Empowerment. The study found gender equity is understood as a matter of fairness and a fundamental prerequisite for the empowerment of society through sustainability. Sustainability can be achieved mainly if there is gender equity in education. The study suggests a multifaceted approach and implementation of policies and initiatives to eliminate discriminative practices and promote responsive pedagogy, which can help achieve gender equity in education. The study suggests creating a safe and inclusive learning environment by investing in teacher and professional training and adopting gender-sensitive teaching practices. Gender equity can be achieved by collective efforts, engaging communities to address systematic barriers, and prioritising gender equity in education.

Zhimomi & Kishorechand (2024) attempted to write an article on Empowering Women in Naga Society: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities. The study found despite being educated, Naga women face challenges in various fields, such as education and healthcare. Women face deep-rooted challenges such as underrepresentation in decision-making, limited access to resources, and gender discrimination, which impact their well-being and their status. The study found that factors such as socio-economic, cultural, and political factors, including cultural barriers, have prevented Naga women from participating in decision-making, and women face gender discrimination with restricted access to resources, leading to underrepresentation in administration and decision-making power.

### 3. MAJOR FINDINGS BASED ON OBJECTIVE I

To study the various factors contributing to gender inequity in Nagaland.

From the study based on the analysis of data incorporated from secondary sources, the following are some of the findings:

- Naga society is deeply patriarchal, with men holding the decision-making power within families and communities. This leads to little or no involvement of women in decision-making, leadership roles, or community governance.
- Women's economic autonomy is restricted, reinforcing gender inequalities due to the typical customary law on property rights, which is typically passed through the male line.
- Cultural norms and practices of the Naga tribes strengthen gender roles, and women are confined to domestic duties and caregiving responsibilities, restricting women's access to economic opportunities and education.
- In rural areas, there is limited access to quality education and vocational training, especially for women. Women have limited employment opportunities and employability in the formal economy. Employment prospects are already limited in Nagaland, and even the existing agricultural, government, and trade jobs favour men over women in the state.
- Traditional tribal councils restrict /exclude women's participation in politics. There have been historical challenges in electing women in legislative bodies. Women are consistently underrepresented in decision-making and political positions in Nagaland.
- Societal attitudes towards women and safety concerns restrict women's participation in social and economic life. Women who face gender violence have limited access to legal resources and support services.
- There is a lack of gender-sensitive health care, which often causes challenges for Naga women, causing poor health conditions and their inability to contribute to realise their full potential and participate as empowered members of society.
- There is a lack of awareness about gender rights and advocacy for both genders. This leads to discriminatory practices and stereotypes
- Naga women are economically dependent on men, which is a barrier for women.
- Some customary laws practised in the Naga society hamper women's progress.
- Some traditions stand as a barrier for the Naga women because they do not recognise the rights of Naga women.



### 3.2. SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS BASED ON OBJECTIVE II

To suggest measures that can help to bring gender equity in Nagaland

A multifaceted approach is required to address gender equity, which can address various social, cultural, economic, and political factors that cause gender inequity. The following measures can help bring gender equity to Nagaland.

- Implement quality education and access to education, especially for girls and women, by building more schools in remote areas, upgrading the existing schools, and arbitrating if they are functioning well.
- Offer free and subsidised study materials, conveyance, and hygienic toilet facilities.
- Educate the community about the importance of education and challenge gender stereotypes by conducting workshops and seminars involving the community, especially women.
- Support women by providing training, financing loan facilities with minimum interest, conducting mentorship programs for women who want to start businesses, and establishing networks for women entrepreneurs.
- Implement policies that encourage gender diversity in the workplace and create job prospects for women in both private and public sectors.
- Implement gender-supportive policies in the workplace.
- Provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services for all.
- Promote initiatives that work towards the prevention of gender violence and set up support systems with facilities such as legal aids, counselling services, and helplines for gender-based violence survivors.
- Encourage more women to participate in politics, hold leadership and administrative positions, and implement reservations for women in politics and decision-making.
- Highlight the achievements of women and encourage women to inspire and motivate women through their achievements.
- Work with the community people and leaders and challenge the discriminatory traditional norms and practices that encourage discrimination against women.
- Engage women as policymakers and implement policies that address Naga women's specific needs and challenges.
- Educate women in technology and create a safe digital environment where women can participate freely and fearlessly.
- Involve men and boys in promoting gender quality programs.
- The champion and the custodian of customary laws should work jointly to retain the same rights for women by giving space for women's spaces.

### 3.3. SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS BASED ON OBJECTIVE III

To study the impact of education on women's empowerment.

Education is the most powerful tool for empowering women. It has a far-reaching impact on families, communities, and societies.

The following findings on how education can impact women's empowerment can be summarised from the study.

- Educated women will likely be financially independent and secure better jobs with higher earnings.
- Educated women, if well-equipped with skills, can be promising entrepreneurs and financially independent.
- Educated women can have diverse career opportunities in areas where men have been dominant; education gives women economic independence and self-resilience.
- Educated women have better knowledge of health and hygiene; they are better informed on nutrition and healthcare and decisions related to the health of their families. The infant mortality rate can be reduced when women are educated, and family planning and delays in early marriages can be possible only when women are educated.

- Educated women are likely to assume leadership positions and can challenge and advocate for the change of traditional gender roles.
- Education empowers women by building self-confidence, enabling them to make the right decisions about their lives and marriages. It enables women to gain confidence and have a say in household decisions, seek support, and discourage discrimination based on gender.
- Educated women serve as role models and bring assorted prospects by fostering creativity. Education aids creativity and problem-solving in women and enables them to realise their potential and work for the betterment of society.

#### 4. WAY FORWARD

Naga women are well-educated, and there is extensive advancement in the field of education; educated women from the Naga society must come forward and highlight the issues that women have been facing for ages, create awareness, and motivate women to enter the age-old male-dominated areas of society. Educated and senior women must serve as role models in society and family, actively create awareness of women's issues, and participate in community programs, politics, and administration. There needs to be a paradigm shift at the grassroots level, and society should embrace inclusivity; the concept of men as the ultimate decision-makers must be removed as a paradigm shift.

Students must be inculcated with democratic values and allowed to participate in decision-making to the extent that it is feasible, and critical thinking and reflection must be encouraged. The concept of gender equality must be introduced to all children in schools by introducing lessons on gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. This will help to promote a more equitable mindset at a young age and challenge stereotypes. The curriculum itself must address gender stereotyping and biases and factors causing gender inequality identified early on.

At the societal level, customary laws should be reinterpreted and evolve.

Women must be included in skill development and technology; without these, they cannot be empowered or included. Men and boys must also be actively involved in spreading gender neutrality by organizing programs on gender sensitisation.

##### **Equal access to education must be safeguarded.**

The government and other stakeholders must adopt policies and enforce laws against discrimination based on gender in all sectors. Gender budgeting and quotas must be implemented to ensure equal representation in leadership, politics, and decision-making roles. Efforts must be made to create an inclusive workplace and offer flexible work assignments that support work-life balance. At the household and family level, one should promote shared domestic responsibilities for childcare, caregiving for elders, and household chores, for it is at home that ideas of gender discrimination and inequality take root.

#### 4.1. CONCLUSION

For the holistic development of a nation, women's empowerment is vital. To foster equity and empowerment in Nagaland, a multifaceted approach is vivacious for a state where cultural sensitivity, economic support, policy enforcement, and community participation can be cohesive. In the state of Nagaland, women's positions are much better than in the other Indian states. Women are well-educated, with a female literacy ratio of 76.11% and 82.75% male, but women still face discrimination in society despite being educated; women do not have the power of decision-making, administration, political participation, and inheritance of properties. There exists a multifaceted interplay of tradition, gender, and legal frameworks in Nagaland that reflect patriarchal values and limits women in decision-making, inheritance, and leadership roles. Article 371(A) of the Indian constitution gave a legal recognition of the Naga customary law, necessitating severe efforts to reform these practices. The advocacy of Naga women's organisations has exposed Naga women at the national and global levels and increased their literacy rates. Women are coming forward to challenge the status quo and push for a more inclusive interpretation of the customary law. Efforts are needed to engage traditional leaders, policymakers, and the Naga community to discuss and harmonise customary practices with modern legal standards and protect women's rights. There is a need for a careful balance of respecting cultural traditions and advocating reforms for the rights and dignity of the Naga women. Education without freedom to make decisions is inoperable, and respect without power is impractical. The evils of gender discrimination and the traditional mindset can



be eradicated when educated women come up together and fight for their rights. Women must encourage women on gender rights. Barriers in girls' education, if addressed and empowered through skills, Nagaland can make substantial progress towards an equitable society. With progress in time, customary laws can be evolved and reinterpreted for the benefit of the Naga society. This will contribute to the state's overall economic development, making it an equitable society. Reinterpretation of customary law may not be an easy task in a deep-rooted patriarchal society, but if all folks change their mindset and come up with a broader way of thinking to reinterpret the traditional customary law, holistic development of the state of Nagaland can be anticipated, and sustainability can be achieved.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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