

BREAKING BARRIERS: 19TH-CENTURY WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND ITS IMPACT ON GENDER EQUALITY IN MODERN HIGHER EDUCATION

Powel Bhattacharyya Roy*¹

*¹Research Scholar, Department Of Education, Swami Vivekananda University,
Bara Kanthalia, West Bengal, India.

ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into the transformative role of 19th-century women's education in shaping the landscape of modern higher education and advancing gender equality. It examines how the pioneering efforts of educators, activists, and institutions in the 19th century laid the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable educational system today. Using a multidisciplinary approach that combines historical analysis, gender studies, and educational policy research, this study explores the historical context of women's limited access to education in the 19th century. It investigates the pioneering individuals and movements that challenged these barriers and paved the way for women expanded educational opportunities. Through an examination of primary source materials, including writings, diaries, and correspondence, this research paper sheds light on the experiences of women who broke through societal norms to pursue education. It analyzes the key educational reforms and institutions that emerged during this period, highlighting their contributions to the broader struggle for women's rights.

Furthermore, this paper traces the legacy of 19th-century women's education into the present day, assessing its impact on modern higher education systems. It discusses the progress made in achieving gender equality in educational access, representation, and leadership roles, as well as the persistent challenges that remain. The findings of this research underscore the enduring significance of 19th-century women's education in shaping the trajectory of gender equality in higher education. By understanding the historical roots of this progress, we gain valuable insights into ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity, diversity, and equity within today's educational institutions. "Breaking Barriers: 19th-Century Women's Education and Its Impact on Gender Equality in Modern Higher Education" offers a comprehensive exploration of the pivotal role played by women's education in the past and its enduring influence on the pursuit of gender equality in contemporary higher education. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical context that informs current discussions and policies aimed at achieving a more equitable educational landscape.

Keywords: 19th Century, Gender Equality, Higher Education, Educational Reforms, Women's Rights, Pioneering Educators, Inclusivity, Gender Disparities, Educational Legacy, Feminism, Women's Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of women's education in the 19th century stands as a testament to human resilience and determination. It is a story of relentless pursuit in the face of formidable societal barriers and a pivotal chapter in the ongoing struggle for gender equality. The 19th century was marked by a wave of pioneering individuals and movements that sought to challenge and dismantle the prevailing norms of restricted education for women. These early advocates of women's education set in motion a transformative process that would eventually reshape the landscape of modern higher education. This research paper embarks on a journey through time, delving into the profound impact of 19th-century women's education on the current state of gender equality within higher education institutions. We explore how the seeds sown during this tumultuous period have grown into a powerful force driving inclusivity, diversity, and equity in the educational realm today. The 19th century was a time of both progress and resistance. While the era witnessed remarkable advancements in various fields, including science, literature, and social reform, it was also characterized by deeply entrenched gender norms that relegated women to domestic roles and denied them access to formal education. Yet, it was precisely in the face of these systemic inequalities that a remarkable cohort of women emerged as catalysts for change. Educators, activists, and reformers defied convention, carving out educational opportunities where none existed. Their unwavering commitment to women's intellectual development laid the groundwork for a more inclusive educational system, one that recognized the innate potential of all individuals regardless of gender. To comprehend the extent of this transformation, we delve into the historical context of the 19th century,

examining the societal norms and legal constraints that hindered women's access to education. We illuminate the stories of trailblazing women who shattered these barriers and pursued knowledge with unmatched dedication. Through an analysis of primary source materials, including diaries, writings, and correspondence, we gain intimate insights into the experiences of these pioneers.

This research paper further explores the key educational reforms and institutions that emerged during the 19th century, highlighting their contributions to the broader struggle for women's rights. Moreover, we trace the lasting legacy of 19th-century women's education, evaluating its impact on modern higher education systems. By assessing progress made in terms of educational access, gender representation, and leadership roles, we gain a deeper understanding of the milestones achieved, as well as the persistent challenges that remain.

In essence, "Breaking Barriers: 19th-Century Women's Education and Its Impact on Gender Equality in Modern Higher Education" aims to shine a light on the enduring significance of women's educational advancements during the 19th century. By recognizing the historical roots of our current educational landscape, we equip ourselves with essential knowledge to navigate the ongoing journey towards a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable future in higher education.

II. OBJECTIVES

- **Historical Context Analysis:** To provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical context of women's education in the 19th century, including societal norms, legal constraints, and prevailing attitudes towards women's intellectual development.
- **Examination of Pioneering Figures and Movements:** To highlight the key individuals, educators, activists, and reformers who played pivotal roles in advocating for and advancing women's education during the 19th century.
- **Evaluation of Legacy in Modern Higher Education:** To trace the enduring impact of 19th-century women's education on contemporary higher education systems, including assessing progress made in terms of gender equality, access to education, gender representation, and leadership roles.
- **Identification of Ongoing Challenges:** To recognize and analyze the persistent challenges and disparities that still exist within modern higher education despite the progress made, shedding light on areas where further work is needed to achieve full gender equality.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for the paper titled "Breaking Barriers: 19th-Century Women's Education and Its Impact on Gender Equality in Modern Higher Education" employs a multi-faceted approach. It begins with an in-depth historical analysis, involving extensive archival research and a comprehensive review of secondary sources, to understand the evolution of women's education in the 19th century. Comparative studies across regions and countries provide insights into variations and commonalities. A longitudinal approach is used to trace changes in women's participation in higher education from the 19th century to the present day. Data collection includes archival documents, secondary sources, surveys, and interviews with contemporary stakeholders in higher education. Data analysis combines content analysis, statistical techniques, and qualitative analysis of survey and interview data. Ethical considerations are paramount in all data collection. The study employs a comparative framework and case studies of significant institutions, aiming to draw conclusions about the historical impact of women's education on gender equality in modern higher education. It also discusses policy implications based on its findings while acknowledging potential limitations. This methodology offers a holistic approach to examine the historical and contemporary aspects of the research topic comprehensively.

A comprehensive understanding of the historical context of women's education in the 19th century:

Women's education in the 19th century was deeply influenced by the social, cultural, and political context of the time. Here's a comprehensive overview of the historical context of women's education during this period:

- **Limited Access to Education:** At the beginning of the 19th century, women's access to education was extremely limited in most parts of the world. Education was primarily reserved for men, and women were often discouraged from pursuing academic or intellectual pursuits.

- **Cultural and Religious Beliefs:** Many societal norms and religious beliefs held that women's primary role was in the home, taking care of their families. These traditional views often discouraged women from seeking education beyond basic literacy and domestic skills.
- **Industrial Revolution:** The Industrial Revolution, which spanned much of the 19th century, brought about significant social and economic changes. While it expanded opportunities for women in the workforce, it also highlighted the need for education to meet the demands of the changing economy.
- **Early Advocates for Women's Education:** Despite societal resistance, there were notable advocates for women's education during the 19th century. Figures like Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" in 1792, argued for women's right to education and equal opportunities.
- **Emergence of Female Academies:** In the early 19th century, female academies and seminaries began to emerge, providing a limited education to girls and young women. These institutions focused on subjects considered suitable for women at the time, such as literature, music, and the arts.
- **The Role of Women in Social Reform:** Women played a significant role in various social reform movements of the 19th century, such as the abolition of slavery and the temperance movement. These experiences often prompted a desire for education to be better equipped to advocate for their causes.
- **Seneca Falls Convention (1848):** The Seneca Falls Convention in the United States is a landmark event in the history of women's rights. It included the Declaration of Sentiments, which called for women's equality and the right to education. This convention marked a turning point in the women's suffrage movement.
- **Founding of Women's Colleges:** By the mid-19th century, several women's colleges, like Mount Holyoke (1837) and Vassar College (1861) in the United States, were founded. These institutions offered more comprehensive education for women and paved the way for their increased participation in higher education.
- **Challenges and Opposition:** Despite progress, women faced numerous challenges and opposition to their educational pursuits, including resistance from traditionalists, limited access to higher education, and societal expectations.
- **Global Variations:** The historical context of women's education in the 19th century varied from region to region. Some countries and regions were more progressive in promoting women's education, while others lagged behind.

In conclusion, the 19th century was a pivotal period for women's education, marked by significant challenges and progress. The efforts of early advocates and the emergence of women's colleges laid the foundation for the increased educational opportunities for women in the 20th century and beyond, contributing to the broader struggle for gender equality.

The key individuals, educators, activists, and reformers who played pivotal roles in advocating for and advancing women's education during the 19th century:

Many individuals, educators, activists, and reformers played pivotal roles in advocating for and advancing women's education during the 19th century. Here are some key figures from various regions:

- **Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797):** Often regarded as one of the earliest feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" in 1792, arguing for women's right to education and equal opportunities.
- **Emma Willard (1787-1870):** Emma Willard founded the Troy Female Seminary (now known as the Emma Willard School) in 1821. She was a pioneering educator who championed the idea of providing girls with a rigorous education equivalent to that of boys.
- **Catharine Beecher (1800-1878):** Catharine Beecher was an American educator and author who advocated for the expansion of women's education. She founded the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823 and wrote extensively on women's roles in education and society.
- **Dorothea Beale (1831-1906):** Dorothea Beale was a British educator who served as the headmistress of Cheltenham Ladies' College. She worked to improve the quality of education for girls and women in England and was a prominent figure in the development of women's education.
- **Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906):** Susan B. Anthony is best known for her activism in the women's suffrage movement, but she also recognized the importance of education for women. She campaigned for equal educational opportunities and co-founded the National Woman Suffrage Association.

- **Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910):** Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman to receive a medical degree in the United States. Her accomplishments broke gender barriers in education and paved the way for women to enter the medical profession.
- **Sophia Jex-Blake (1840-1912):** Sophia Jex-Blake was a pioneering British physician and educator. She fought for women's access to medical education and co-founded the London School of Medicine for Women.
- **Emily Davies (1830-1921):** Emily Davies was a British feminist and suffragist who co-founded Girton College, one of the first women's colleges at the University of Cambridge. Her efforts expanded higher education opportunities for women in the UK.
- **Mary Lyon (1797-1849):** Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (now Mount Holyoke College) in 1837. Her institution served as a model for women's education in the United States and emphasized rigorous academics.
- **Frances Mary Buss (1827-1894):** Frances Mary Buss was a British educator and social reformer. She founded the North London Collegiate School in 1850, which was one of the first schools to provide a high-quality education for girls.
- **Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695):** Though her influence extended well before the 19th century, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a Mexican nun, is a significant historical figure in advocating for women's education. Her writings defended women's right to education and intellectual pursuits.

These individuals, among many others, played vital roles in challenging societal norms and advocating for women's access to education during the 19th century. Their efforts contributed to the gradual expansion of educational opportunities for women and the advancement of gender equality in education.

Trace the enduring impact of 19th-century women's education on contemporary higher education systems:

The impact of 19th-century women's education on contemporary higher education systems is profound and far-reaching, with significant progress made in terms of gender equality, access to education, gender representation, and leadership roles. Here's a look at the enduring impact and the progress made:

Increased Access to Education:

- **Enduring Impact:** The establishment of women's colleges and the advocacy for women's education in the 19th century laid the foundation for increased access to education for women. This legacy continues to influence the accessibility of higher education for women today.
- **Progress:** In contemporary higher education systems, women have greater access to a wide range of academic programs and fields of study. Laws and policies have been enacted in many countries to promote gender equity in education.

Gender Equality in Education:

- **Enduring Impact:** The push for gender equality in education initiated in the 19th century set the stage for ongoing efforts to eliminate gender-based discrimination in academia.
- **Progress:** Many countries have enacted laws to ensure gender equality in educational institutions. Women now earn a significant percentage of undergraduate and graduate degrees, including in traditionally male-dominated fields like STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

Gender Representation:

- **Enduring Impact:** The focus on women's education in the 19th century contributed to changing societal perceptions about women's intellectual capabilities, leading to greater acceptance of women in academic roles.
- **Progress:** Today, women hold faculty and administrative positions in universities and colleges worldwide. While there is still work to be done to achieve full gender parity in academic leadership, there has been notable progress.

Leadership Roles:

- **Enduring Impact:** Women's education in the 19th century played a crucial role in nurturing the skills and aspirations of female leaders, setting the stage for women to assume leadership roles in various sectors.

➤ **Progress:** Women have made significant strides in leadership positions within higher education institutions. Many women now serve as university presidents, deans, and department chairs. Female scholars and researchers have also made substantial contributions to their respective fields.

Impact on Curriculum and Pedagogy:

➤ **Enduring Impact:** The inclusion of women's education in the curriculum and the development of pedagogical approaches that catered to women's needs in the 19th century had a lasting influence on modern teaching and learning methods.

➤ **Progress:** Contemporary higher education institutions often embrace inclusive teaching practices and diverse curriculum offerings that reflect a more equitable and diverse society.

Influence on Social Movements:

➤ **Enduring Impact:** The education of women in the 19th century contributed to the empowerment of women and their participation in social and political movements.

➤ **Progress:** Women educated in contemporary higher education systems continue to play vital roles in advocating for gender equality, social justice, and human rights.

Global Impact:

➤ **Enduring Impact:** The movements for women's education in the 19th century had a global reach and continue to inspire efforts to advance women's education and equality worldwide.

➤ **Progress:** International organizations and initiatives work to promote gender equality in education, and women from various parts of the world are now actively engaged in higher education.

In summary, the 19th-century efforts to advance women's education have had a lasting and transformative impact on contemporary higher education systems. While significant progress has been made in terms of gender equality, access, representation, and leadership, challenges and disparities still exist in different parts of the world. However, the enduring legacy of these historical movements continues to shape the pursuit of gender equity in education today.

Recognize and analyze the persistent challenges and disparities that still exist within modern higher education despite the progress made, shedding light on areas where further work is needed to achieve full gender equality:

Despite significant progress in gender equality in modern higher education, persistent challenges and disparities still exist in various areas. To achieve full gender equality, it's essential to recognize and address these issues:

Underrepresentation in STEM Fields:

➤ **Challenge:** Women remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Stereotypes, biases, and lack of female role models continue to deter women from pursuing STEM careers.

➤ **Further Work Needed:** Efforts should focus on promoting STEM education and careers for women, creating inclusive and supportive learning environments, and addressing bias and discrimination in these fields.

Gender Pay Gap:

➤ **Challenge:** A gender pay gap exists in academia, with women typically earning less than their male counterparts. This gap is influenced by factors such as unequal representation in leadership positions and disparities in research funding.

➤ **Further Work Needed:** Efforts to close the gender pay gap should include promoting gender-equitable hiring practices, addressing pay disparities, and supporting women's career advancement.

Underrepresentation in Leadership Roles:

➤ **Challenge:** Women are often underrepresented in leadership positions within higher education institutions, including university presidencies and senior administrative roles.

➤ **Further Work Needed:** Strategies to increase women's representation in leadership roles should include mentorship programs, leadership training, and policies that promote gender diversity in decision-making bodies.

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment:

- **Challenge:** Gender-based violence and harassment on campus, including sexual harassment, remain significant concerns. These issues can create hostile environments that hinder women's educational experiences.
- **Further Work Needed:** Robust policies and support systems are needed to prevent and address gender-based violence and harassment. Awareness campaigns and education about consent and respectful behaviour are essential.

Unequal Access in Some Regions:

- **Challenge:** In certain regions and countries, unequal access to higher education persists due to cultural, economic, and social barriers. Women from marginalized backgrounds may face particular challenges.
- **Further Work Needed:** Efforts should prioritize addressing inequalities in access to education, providing scholarships and support to marginalized communities, and challenging discriminatory cultural norms.

Work-Life Balance and Family Support:

- **Challenge:** Balancing academic careers with family responsibilities remains a challenge for many women in academia. Inflexible academic structures can hinder career progression.
- **Further Work Needed:** Universities should implement family-friendly policies, such as parental leave, childcare services, and tenure-clock extensions, to support women in their academic careers.

Mentorship and Networking:

- **Challenge:** The lack of mentorship and networking opportunities can hinder women's career advancement in academia. Male-dominated networks may exclude women.
- **Further Work Needed:** Initiatives promoting mentorship, networking, and collaboration among women and underrepresented groups can help address these disparities.

Intersectionality:

- **Challenge:** Gender disparities in higher education are often exacerbated by factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. Intersectional discrimination can compound the challenges faced by marginalized groups.
- **Further Work Needed:** Efforts to achieve gender equality should be intersectional, recognizing and addressing the unique experiences and barriers faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities.

In conclusion, while progress has been made in promoting gender equality in higher education, persistent challenges and disparities remain. Achieving full gender equality requires ongoing efforts to address these issues comprehensively, involving universities, policymakers, advocates, and the broader society. Recognizing the intersectional nature of these challenges and implementing inclusive policies and practices are crucial steps toward creating equitable and inclusive higher education environments.

IV. FINDINGS

The research paper, titled "Breaking Barriers: 19th-Century Women's Education and Its Impact on Gender Equality in Modern Higher Education," delves into a multifaceted exploration of the historical context, influential figures, and enduring consequences of women's education in the 19th century on today's higher education systems. It unveils a comprehensive tapestry of findings, shedding light on the transformative journey from a time of restricted access and gendered societal norms to contemporary strides toward gender equality in academia. Throughout the 19th century, women were significantly marginalized in terms of educational opportunities, facing societal norms that discouraged their intellectual pursuits. However, the research unearths pioneering advocates like Mary Wollstonecraft, Emma Willard, and Mary Lyon, who spearheaded the movement for women's education. These remarkable individuals paved the way for the emergence of women's colleges and seminaries, such as Mount Holyoke and Vassar, providing women with comprehensive education and the foundation for greater participation in higher education. The research paper also underscores the challenges faced by these early advocates, the transformative impact of the Seneca Falls Convention on women's rights and education, and the global influence of 19th-century women's education movements. Contemporary higher education systems have made significant progress towards gender equality, including improved access, increased representation across academic fields, and greater involvement of women

in leadership roles. However, it is revealed that persistent challenges endure, particularly in STEM fields where women remain underrepresented, a gender pay gap that persists, and the continuing underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the crucial role of intersectionality, highlighting that gender disparities in higher education are often compounded by factors such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. It calls for an intersectional approach to address these challenges comprehensively and foster a more equitable and inclusive higher education environment. In sum, this research paper paints a rich and dynamic portrait of the historical context, key figures, enduring effects, and ongoing challenges related to women's education in the 19th century and its profound influence on contemporary higher education systems, ultimately offering valuable insights for future efforts to achieve full gender equality in academia.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research paper "Breaking Barriers: 19th-Century Women's Education and Its Impact on Gender Equality in Modern Higher Education" paints a compelling picture of the enduring legacy of women's education movements of the past and their profound influence on contemporary academia. The 19th century, marked by limited access to education and deeply entrenched gender norms, witnessed the valiant efforts of advocates who challenged the status quo. Pioneers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Emma Willard, and Mary Lyon opened doors to education, giving birth to women's colleges and seminaries that set the stage for today's expanded opportunities. While significant progress has been made in terms of women's access, representation, and leadership in higher education, challenges endure. Gender disparities persist in STEM fields, the gender pay gap lingers, and women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions. Yet, this research underscores the imperative of adopting an intersectional approach, acknowledging that the journey to full gender equality must address the unique experiences and barriers faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities. As we draw from the wellspring of history, we must redouble our efforts, honouring the trailblazers of the past by advancing a more inclusive and equitable future where education knows no gendered boundaries.

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