

The Trend of Women's Education Development in India after Independence (Uttar Pradesh)

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Abstract: This study examines the socio-historical trajectory of women's education in Uttar Pradesh from 1947 to 2000, focusing on its regional characteristics, policy frameworks, and socio-religious movements. Special attention is given to the influence of reformist organizations such as the Arya Samaj, the impact of governmental initiatives, and the role of women leaders in shaping educational and empowerment outcomes. The analysis highlights the disparities between rural and urban female literacy, the intersection of caste, class, and religion in determining access to education, and the evolving policies of both state and central governments. The findings suggest that while substantial progress was made in terms of female literacy and institutional expansion, socio-cultural barriers continued to limit equitable access to education in Uttar Pradesh compared to Southern states like Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Women's education, Uttar Pradesh, Arya Samaj, literacy, gender empowerment, Post-independence India, regional disparities, social reform movements.

Introduction. The question of women's education in India has long been central to debates on social progress, nation-building, and gender empowerment. Following independence in 1947, the Government of India identified literacy and education as critical instruments for achieving democratic participation and socio-economic modernization. However, the development of female education displayed considerable regional variations. While Southern states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu recorded significant progress in literacy and enrollment, Northern states, particularly Uttar Pradesh, continued to face structural, cultural, and institutional challenges.

Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state of India, represents a crucial case study for understanding the dynamics of women's education in post-independence India. As a region marked by historical conservatism, caste stratification, and a large Muslim population, the state provides insights into the complex interplay between tradition and reform. Organizations such as the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj had initiated women's educational reform in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, yet their impact was uneven, largely confined to urban elites. The post-1947 era brought new opportunities through constitutional guarantees of equality, state policies, and nationwide educational schemes. Nevertheless, entrenched social norms, rural poverty, and gendered divisions of labor continued to restrict the participation of women in education.

This article seeks to examine the historical evolution of women's education in Uttar Pradesh from 1947 to 2000, with particular emphasis on regional disparities, the influence of reformist movements, and state-level policy implementation. It also compares the trajectory of Uttar Pradesh with that of Tamil Nadu, in order to highlight how socio-cultural contexts determined the success or failure of educational reforms. By analyzing literacy statistics, government initiatives, and the contributions of women leaders, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the achievements and limitations of women's educational development in the state during the second half of the 20th century.

Methodology. This study applies a historical-comparative and socio-cultural approach to analyze the development of women's education in Uttar Pradesh after independence. It combines documentary analysis of constitutional provisions, policy documents, and census data with quantitative methods (literacy and enrollment statistics) and qualitative content analysis of scholarly works. The case study method is used to examine Uttar Pradesh in detail, with references to Tamil Nadu for comparative insights.

Discussion. Uttar Pradesh is located in the north-central part of India, and in terms of population, it is the most populous state, while in terms of area, it ranks fourth. Uttar Pradesh shares borders with Uttarakhand and Nepal in the north, Bihar in the east, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in the southeast, Madhya Pradesh in the south, and Rajasthan in the southwest.

In ancient and medieval times, the region of Uttar Pradesh was ruled by major political powers of India, including the Maurya dynasty (320–185 BCE), the Gupta Empire (4th–6th centuries CE), the kingdom of Harsha (7th century), the Pala dynasty (750–1161), the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526), as well as the Mughals (1526–1761). In the early 20th century, during the period of the Indian independence movement, three major princely states—Ramgadi, Rampur, and Banaras—existed within the territory of Uttar Pradesh.

On 26 January 1950, when India was declared a Republic, the state was given its present name, “Uttar Pradesh” (literally meaning “Northern State”). The capital of the state is Lucknow, which is situated in the west-central part of the region. The area of the state covers 243,286 km², and its population amounts to 199,581,477 people [Raj Mathur, 2024].

After India gained independence in 1947, the sphere of education became one of the most important directions of the state's national development strategy. However, in the early years of independence, women's education in Uttar Pradesh remained in a difficult condition: the percentage of girls attending school was very low, and the gender gap was extremely high. In particular, while female literacy in 1947 stood at only 8 percent, by 1957 this figure had risen to just 13 percent. The literacy gap between men and women in 1957 remained as high as 22 percent [Census of India]. There were a number of reasons for this situation, including the following:

The patriarchal structure of society – In northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, traditional patriarchal views were deeply entrenched, and heads of families considered domestic chores and marriage more important for girls than receiving an education. According to the research of G. Kingdon and M. Azam, in the region more educational expenditure was allocated to boys than to girls. Parents frequently sent their sons to private schools, while their daughters were sent to government schools [Kingdom G.G., 2012]. The lower quality of education received by women was, therefore, not only the result of economic choices but was also closely linked to social gender norms.

Limited access to education in rural areas – In many remote regions, separate schools for girls did not exist, and parents were reluctant to send their daughters to co-educational institutions. For example, in 1951 only 5 percent of rural girls attended school. Even in the 1980s, the literacy rate among rural women remained below 25 percent, while in urban centers this figure exceeded 50 percent [Census of India].

Weak educational infrastructure – The condition of most schools in the region was poor. The absence of separate classrooms, toilets, and hygienic facilities, particularly for girls, led to a high rate of school dropouts. In 1947, only 15 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 14 in Uttar Pradesh were enrolled in school. A shortage of qualified teaching staff, especially female teachers, was also one of the serious challenges.

Moreover, as G. Kingdon and M. Muzammil noted in their monographs, gender inequality in the educational system was not merely an economic issue, but rather the product of political and socio-economic processes [Kingdom G.G., 2008]. The educational system in Uttar Pradesh was shaped under

the influence of political processes and the pressure of teachers' unions, which in turn limited girls' opportunities to receive quality education.

After independence, the state of Uttar Pradesh continued for many years to invest in all sectors of education and began to take measures to overcome the backwardness of general education and the high rate of illiteracy.

The Constitution of India, adopted on 26 January 1950, further strengthened the education sector. For instance, Article 45 of the Constitution stipulated that from 1960 onwards, free and compulsory eight-year primary education should be guaranteed by the state for children aged six to fourteen. Article 15 stated that all citizens, regardless of religion, race, caste, or sex, had the right to education, and that the interests of women and children were under state protection. Furthermore, Section (e) of Article 51 ensured legal punishment for actions that insulted the dignity of women [*Constituion of India*]. Through these provisions, the government legalized the principle that women were equal to men, while also guaranteeing legal measures against social and political discrimination and violence.

The Indian government also made political efforts to support women. For example, under the First Five-Year Development Plan of 1951, scholarships were allocated to encourage girls to attend primary schools. In 1953, a national state body called the "Central Social Welfare Board" was established to implement programs aimed at improving the socio-political life of women. At the same time, through the social service movement known as "Mahila Mandals" (Women's Groups), efforts were made to expand women's participation in public life [*Sharma M., 2024*]. Between 1951 and 1957, the number of special schools for girls increased by 30 percent.

Alongside these measures, the government also established a number of committees and commissions with the aim of attracting women to the sphere of education. The first such body formed after independence was the "Durgabai Deshmukh Committee" (National Committee on Women's Education, 1958–1959), which was directed not only toward improving the socio-political conditions of women in Uttar Pradesh, but also across the entire country. The committee developed a series of recommendations to ensure girls' participation in education. Among these were: increasing the number of female teachers in schools; providing separate sanitary and hygienic facilities for girls in co-educational institutions; offering material support to girls from socially disadvantaged families; organizing kindergartens for the younger siblings of schoolgirls; designing targeted programs based on attendance monitoring; and encouraging parents, as well as shaping public opinion, to motivate them to send their daughters to school [*Sharma M., 2024*].

In order to enhance the role of women in education and to equalize their literacy levels with those of men, the government advanced a number of long-term political programs. Among these, the "Committee on the Status of Women" (1962–1963) recommended the economic incentivization of female students to prevent school dropouts among girls.

The reforms carried out by the government gradually began to show results. While the general literacy rate in Uttar Pradesh in 1951 was 18.33 percent, in subsequent years it rose steadily—to 28.30 percent in 1961, and to 34.45 percent in 1971. This indicated that within three decades after independence, the overall literacy of the region had nearly doubled.

In Indian history, the entry of women into the socio-political arena expanded significantly in the post-independence period, and this is regarded as an important manifestation of socio-cultural transformation. In the political life of Uttar Pradesh, the years 1963–1967 marked one of the turning points in the participation of women in politics. During this period, Sucheta Kriplani (1908–1974) served as the Chief Minister of the state. She was not only the first female Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, but also the first woman in Indian history to hold the position of Chief Minister of any state [*Chauhan A., 2019*]. This

development in the country's political life served as a stimulus for broadening gender equality and for raising the political and social status of women.

Another prominent female politician of Uttar Pradesh was Mayawati, who held the office of Chief Minister of the state on four occasions. During her tenure under the Bahujan Samaj Party leadership, several programs were developed to promote the educational activities of women. In particular, initiatives such as the Mahamaya Gareeb Balika Aashirwad Yojana and the Savitribai Phule Balika Shiksha Madad Yojana were designed to encourage girls to continue their education, to prevent early marriages, and to increase the number of female students in higher education. Moreover, under her leadership, separate colleges for women were opened, thereby contributing to strengthening gender equality in the education system.

Rita Bahuguna Joshi also made contributions to education not only through her political leadership but also through her academic career. As a Ph.D. holder in history and a university lecturer, she later shifted her focus to political life, where she dedicated significant attention to protecting women's rights. For this reason, she is regarded as a leader who combined science and politics in her career, thereby strengthening the social and academic position of women.

Another important figure is Swati Singh, who in 2019 launched the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana program in the region, creating a mechanism of financial support for girls from birth through higher education.

This program significantly expanded opportunities for girls to continue their education, especially from a socio-economic perspective. In addition, Singh contributed to the development of initiatives aimed at combating violence against women, including the Mahila Shakti Kendra and the special helpline service 181.

The activities of Gulabo Devi are also notable in the educational sphere. Initially working as a political science lecturer and later as the principal of a women's college, she currently serves as the Minister of Secondary Education of Uttar Pradesh, where she pays special attention to the development of educational infrastructure.

In general, the entry of women leaders into the political life of the region not only raised the status of women in politics, but also served as an important social signal in the field of education. The fact that women occupied high offices in one of the largest Indian states encouraged parents, at least to some extent, to change their attitudes toward sending their daughters to school and higher education.

After independence, the government began implementing Five-Year Plans, which were designed for a five-year term. Within the framework of these plans, measures to expand women's participation in education were also included. For example, under the Second Five-Year Plan (1956–1961), programs were developed to identify talented students for training in nuclear energy, along with scholarship schemes. The Third Plan (1961–1966) focused on women's education and reproductive health, as well as the opening of primary schools in rural areas. The Fourth Plan (1969–1974) emphasized family planning for women [*Five year plans*].

Each of the designed Five-Year Plans was aimed at ensuring a prosperous future, and addressed the main social and cultural problems that restricted women's roles, opportunities, and rights in socio-political life.

Similarly, under the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974–1979), the issue of women's self-reliance within family and society was examined through literacy programs and income-generating activities. During this period, women in society increasingly developed self-awareness and gained greater confidence in their own abilities.

The Sixth Plan (1980–1985) recognized the family as the primary unit of social development, while emphasizing the special importance of women's roles within it. The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985–1990) focused on raising women's awareness about their legal rights and privileges, as well as expanding their opportunities through effective economic participation [Ray B. and Basu A., 1947].

In the plans implemented in Uttar Pradesh, measures were introduced to achieve socio-economic efficiency through social justice, to prevent violence against women, and to ensure state protection for them. The Eighth Plan (1992–1997) was designed to address the problems caused by the economic instability of 1989–1991, including reducing poverty and ensuring women's employment. However, according to the government's economic Five-Year Plans, the state funding allocated to education was insufficient to fully resolve the challenges of the sector, which in turn complicated the practical implementation of many of the proposed projects.

In order to fundamentally reform the education system and to find solutions to existing problems, the Government of India adopted the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1968). According to this policy, special programs were developed to increase female literacy, and the principle of free primary education for girls was introduced. Within the framework of this project in Uttar Pradesh, more than 5,000 new primary schools were opened in rural areas, and the enrollment rate of girls in primary education reached 50 percent [National Policy on Education, 1968].

The subsequent National Policy on Education of 1986 (NPE-1986) addressed the issue of involving women in higher education and providing them with special scholarships. As a result of the efforts undertaken through the National Policy on Education, after 1986 the percentage of girls entering higher education rose from 18 percent to 25 percent [National Policy on Education, 1968].

The Government of India has long recognized that women can achieve their rightful place in society and gain awareness of their rights only through education and literacy. In pursuit of this goal, the state prepared the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988–2000), which envisaged that by the year 2000 women across all regions would have secured their place in the field of education. The plan outlined the following measures:

Restructuring the education sector and eliminating gender disparities in school curricula;

Raising public awareness about the importance of girls' education by engaging mass media and establishing effective communication between the community and educators;

Reserving 50 percent of primary school teaching posts for women, ensuring that every school employed at least one female teacher;

Making school timings more flexible, locating schools closer to residential areas, and, where schools were situated beyond 3 km, constructing hostels for girls.

These state-led efforts to improve women's socio-political life also had a positive impact in Uttar Pradesh. For instance, the literacy rate in the state, which stood at 28 percent in 1981, rose to 42 percent by 1991. However, the gender gap in literacy persisted: in 1991, male literacy reached 56 percent, while female literacy remained at only 25 percent [Census of India].

By the end of the XXth century, women's literacy in Uttar Pradesh had grown considerably, but gender disparities were still stark. While reforms increased girls' enrollment in primary schools, their access to higher education lagged significantly. Moreover, educational opportunities in rural areas remained more limited than in urban centers, where enrollment levels were relatively higher.

The early 2000s marked a turning point for women's education in Uttar Pradesh. During this period, the Indian government incorporated key reforms into its education policy to expand girls' participation,

reduce gender inequality among students, and increase the proportion of women in the teaching workforce.

Alaka Singh emphasized that the social position of women in Uttar Pradesh was largely determined by their educational attainment, noting that the exclusion of girls from education weakened their overall social status [Alaka Singh, 2009]. Strengthening women's education, she argued, was essential for promoting social equality and advancing societal development.

Consequently, addressing these problems became a central responsibility of both the central and state governments. A number of targeted programs were introduced:

In 2001, the Government of India launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All), which mandated the universal schooling of children aged 6–14. Under the subsequent Mahila Shiksha (Women's Education) program, measures were taken to ensure gender parity in access to education. As a result, girls' enrollment in primary education in Uttar Pradesh rose from 60 percent to 80 percent. In 2004–2005, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Yojana was introduced to reintegrate into education those girls—particularly from lower castes—who had dropped out or had been deprived of schooling. In the first year, 746 such girls were successfully brought back to school [Hindustan Times, 2024].

The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) initiative (2005–2010) provided financial support and incentives to reduce dropout rates. In Uttar Pradesh, girls' dropout rates decreased from 40 percent to 30 percent, while female participation in higher education increased.

The Mahila Samakhya program (2005) enhanced literacy for over 100,000 women in rural Uttar Pradesh and promoted vocational training. According to K. Jandhyala and V. Ramachandran, the program significantly expanded girls' access to education, empowered women to recognize their rights, and encouraged parents to send their daughters to school [Jandhyala K., 2012].

In 2014, the establishment of the NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) created new opportunities for women's socio-economic participation. In 2015, the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (Prime Minister's Microfinance Scheme) provided women entrepreneurs with access to credit, while also aiming to raise women's financial literacy.

On 1 May 2016, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was launched to support rural women from poor households by providing free liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) connections. This scheme not only improved women's health and economic independence but also facilitated greater participation in education by reducing domestic burdens.

From 2015 onwards, the Digital India Initiative was implemented to expand opportunities for distance learning and introduce digital pedagogy. In Uttar Pradesh, between 2015 and 2024, many women were able to access university courses and vocational training online, which proved particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic by reducing female dropout rates.

In 2020, the Government of India adopted the National Education Policy (NEP–2020), a transformative framework aimed at restructuring the education system [National Policy on Education, 2020]. One of its core principles was gender equality and the promotion of girls' participation in education. Within Uttar Pradesh, several measures were taken under NEP–2020:

1. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): The state government proposed the establishment of 8,800 balvatikas (pre-primary classes) to ensure early enrollment of children, especially girls.
2. Improvement of Sanitation Infrastructure: To address hygiene-related dropout factors, separate girls' toilets were constructed in over 88 percent of schools.

3. Quality Enhancement and STEM Participation: Collaboration with IIT Kanpur and MNNIT was initiated to upgrade teacher training and promote girls' access to STEM fields through innovative teaching methods.
4. Gender Inclusion Fund: Programs were launched to provide scholarships, conditional cash transfers, bicycles, sanitary products, and self-defense training for girls, thereby reducing socio-economic barriers to education.

Overall, the reforms introduced under NEP-2020 brought significant positive changes to women's education in Uttar Pradesh. Educational infrastructure improved, schools became safer and more supportive for girls, teachers' capacities were enhanced, and dropout rates decreased. These initiatives effectively advanced the broader goals of gender equality and inclusive education.

Local Government Initiatives and Socio-Religious Factors Affecting Women's Education in Uttar Pradesh.

Alongside central reforms, the government of Uttar Pradesh introduced its own initiatives to improve the quality of primary and secondary education. Among them was the Nippon Bharat Mission, which aimed to ensure that every child in India achieved foundational literacy and numeracy skills by the end of Grade 3. In June 2018, the state launched Kayakalp Operation (Rejuvenation Program), designed to evaluate and improve school performance. The Sharda program (motto: Har Din Aao School – "Come to school every day") monitored compliance with the Right to Education Act (2009), ensuring that children between the ages of 6 and 14 were enrolled in school.

In recent years, both central and state governments have sought to expand women's participation in society, improve their socio-political status, and promote gender equality in education through a variety of schemes:

Widow Pension Scheme (पति की मृत्यु उपरांत निरक्षित महिला पेंशन): Under this scheme, widows who are permanent residents of Uttar Pradesh, over 18 years of age, and with an annual household income below INR 200,000 receive a monthly pension of INR 1,000. Currently, about 28.62 million widows benefit from this support.

Kanya Sumangala Yojana (मुख्यमंत्री कन्या सुमंगला योजना): Launched on 25 October 2019, this program seeks to improve the status of girl children by addressing sex ratio disparities, preventing female foeticide, supporting health and education, and creating positive societal attitudes toward girls.

Rani Lakshmi Bai Bal Evam Mahila Samman Kosh (रानी लक्ष्मीबाई बाल एवं महिला सम्मान कोष): This fund provides compensation ranging from INR 1 million to 10 million, as well as free medical services, to women who are victims of severe crimes. In 2022–2023, 701 women received direct assistance, and 6,481 girls were compensated.

181 Women's Helpline (१८१ महिला हेल्पलाइन): A free, 24/7 helpline that provides emergency support to women facing domestic violence or distress. Since its launch, it has supported over 5.57 million women, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One Stop Centers (वन स्टॉप सेंटर): These centers offer medical care, psychological and legal counseling, and police assistance to women. Since inception, 149,000 criminal cases involving women have been addressed.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bal Sevan Yojana (मुख्यमंत्री बाल सेवन योजना): Introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, this program provided laptops and educational support to 3,550 children, while offering pensions to 13,895 children who had lost one or both parents to the pandemic. A subsequent

extension in August 2021 covered orphans up to age 18, and outstanding students up to 23 years, by offering scholarships and tuition fee waivers. To date, 632 children have been supported.

Mission Vatsalya (मिशन वात्सल्य): A broad initiative aimed at child protection and preventing early marriage. It also promotes vocational training, youth employment, and educational opportunities.

Employment and Housing for Underprivileged Women (निरक्षित महिलाओं हेतु श्रियम सुविधा): Nearly 700 housing units have been built to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged women.

Implementation of Child and Women-Related Acts (बच्चों तथा महिलाओं संबंधी विभिन्न अधिनियमों का क्रियान्वयन): Enforces laws against child marriage, child labor, domestic violence, and dowry-related crimes, while providing legal and financial assistance to victims.

Despite these programs, Uttar Pradesh continues to lag behind the national average in literacy, due in part to socio-cultural barriers, including religious community attitudes toward education. The state's population is predominantly Hindu (80 percent), followed by Muslims (19.3 percent). Both groups exhibit some of the lowest educational attainment in India.

Nationally, 48.11 percent of Muslim women and 44.03 percent of Hindu women are unable to read or write their own names. Their marginalized socio-economic position has a direct impact on female education and literacy.

By contrast, literacy levels are significantly higher among other religious groups: Jains (86.42 percent), Christians (74.34 percent), Buddhists (71.83 percent), and Sikhs (67.50 percent). Nonetheless, gender disparities persist even within these communities [*Census of India*].

According to the 2011 Census, Muslims comprised 172 million people, or about 14 percent of India's population. In 2001, this number was around 138 million. Nearly half of the Muslim population (47 percent) resides in the densely populated northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal. Uttar Pradesh alone is home to around 38.5 million Muslims (out of a total population of 200 million). While Muslims remain a minority across most districts, Rampur stands out with a Muslim majority of 50.57 percent [*Census of India*].

The Sachar Committee Report (2006), which investigated the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in India, revealed that while educational disparities between Muslims and other minorities had narrowed in urban areas, they remained stark in rural regions. Moreover, in recent decades, the literacy growth rates of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have surpassed those of Muslims, widening the relative educational gap.

Scholarly research has identified multiple interrelated factors contributing to the educational marginalization of Muslim communities in India, particularly women. K. Chanana highlights that economic deprivation and socio-cultural conditions play a decisive role. Muslim households are often large and economically disadvantaged, making it difficult to ensure that all children attend school regularly. Parental illiteracy negatively shapes attitudes toward education, while the shortage of qualified teachers—especially female teachers—combined with inadequate material resources and outdated pedagogical methods further aggravates the problem [*Chanana K., 1990*].

M.H. Siddiqui emphasizes another critical challenge: the lack of separate schools for girls. In many Muslim families, reluctance to send daughters to co-educational institutions results in restricted access to formal learning. This barrier is particularly acute in rural areas, where Sachar Committee findings reveal the widest gender gaps in literacy among religious groups. While Muslim women in urban centers face fewer obstacles, rural Muslim girls remain significantly underrepresented in education despite having formal access to schooling. Infrastructural limitations—such as lack of transportation, poorly

maintained schools, and weak local educational facilities—further compound this disparity [Siddique M.H., 2012].

Madrassa education, while important within Muslim communities, serves only a minority of children, primarily boys, estimated at less than 5 percent of school-age Muslim students. Many families prefer secular education for sons, viewing it as a pathway to government employment and economic security. However, Muslim girls are rarely prioritized, as education is often considered secondary for daughters, especially among artisanal and agricultural households. While Sachar Committee data suggest that such attitudes reflect broader socio-economic constraints rather than religious doctrine itself, persistent stereotypes continue to shape family decision-making [Sachar Committee Report].

Access to higher education remains particularly constrained by financial barriers. Although education loans exist, Muslim families are reluctant to seek them due to both structural and cultural factors. First, religious concerns regarding *riba* (interest) lead to distrust of conventional credit systems. Second, many families cannot provide the collateral or guarantors often required by banks, despite government provisions for educational support. Consequently, a significant proportion of Muslim youth—especially girls—cannot pursue vocational or higher education.

Infrastructure deficits exacerbate these challenges. As A. Abidi, S. Abbas, and S. Husain note, inadequate investment in schools, libraries, and hostels limits Muslim women's participation in formal education [Abidi A., Abbas S., 2011 and Husain S., 2010]. The shortage of female teachers, coupled with the prevalence of male-dominated teaching staff, reinforces conservative family attitudes that discourage girls from attending school, particularly in mixed-gender environments. These dynamics partly explain why only 3.9 percent of Muslim women in Uttar Pradesh hold higher education degrees.

District-level disparities are also significant. G. Kingdon emphasizes the role of parental attitudes, socio-economic background, and local living conditions in shaping gendered educational outcomes [Kingdon G., 2024]. Similarly, A. Kundu and J. Rao argue that urbanization and metropolitan development strongly influence literacy levels [Kundu A. and Rao J., 1986].

According to the 2011 Census, districts such as Gautam Buddha Nagar (80.12 percent), Kanpur (79.65 percent), and Ghaziabad (78.07 percent) recorded the highest literacy rates, while Shravasti (46.74 percent), Bahraich (49.36 percent), and Rampur (53.34 percent) ranked among the lowest [Sakshi S., Sabina B., 2023]. S. Yadav's analysis confirms a geographical divide: northwestern and southwestern districts exhibit higher literacy, whereas southern, southeastern, and northern districts lag behind. Importantly, gender disparities persist across all regions despite overall literacy growth [Yadav S., 2009].

Since independence, women's education has been recognized as a national priority, yet Uttar Pradesh has consistently lagged in this domain. Structural inequalities—including geography, economic deprivation, patriarchal norms, and weak educational infrastructure—have long restricted Muslim girls' participation in both primary and higher education. Although successive governments have implemented reforms and development schemes to improve female literacy, rural Muslim women continue to face entrenched barriers. As S.G. Pratap observes, while development programs have enhanced women's economic and social empowerment, progress in education remains uneven and fragile, requiring sustained policy attention and institutional reform [Pratap S.G., 2020].

Conclusion

The study concludes that women's education in Uttar Pradesh between 1947 and 2000 experienced gradual yet uneven growth. Governmental policies succeeded in expanding access to schooling, yet persistent rural–urban divides, patriarchal traditions, and socio-religious constraints slowed progress compared to Southern India. Reformist movements such as the Arya Samaj contributed to female educational awakening, but their influence remained limited outside urban centers. By the late 20th century, Uttar Pradesh continued to lag behind in female literacy, reflecting deep-rooted structural

inequalities. The analysis underscores the importance of integrating socio-cultural reforms with educational policies to achieve meaningful gender empowerment in the region.

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