

# From Margins to Mainstream: A Study of Dalit Women's Educational Empowerment in Haryana

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## Abstract

This research explores the educational empowerment of Dalit women in Harsaru village, Gurugram district, Haryana, shedding light on historical barriers, contemporary challenges, and the transformative potential of education. Drawing on a sample of 80 Dalit women, the study employs a survey method and questionnaire to delve into their demographic information, educational background, occupation, and socio-economic status. Findings reveal persistent educational barriers, limited higher education opportunities, and a diversification of occupations. While 65% of women with secondary or higher education report higher empowerment, 60% experience limited participation in decision-making. Statistical analysis confirms a positive correlation between education and empowerment ( $p < 0.05$ ). The study underscores the need for targeted policies, with 75% of women expressing this necessity.

**Keywords:** Dalit women, education, empowerment, socio-economic status, Haryana, intersectionality.

## INTRODUCTION

In the sprawling landscapes of Haryana, a state rich in cultural heritage and historical significance, the echoes of social inequalities reverberate, especially for Dalit women. Haryana, despite its economic progress and infrastructural development, remains shackled by the chains of caste-based discrimination, where the intersectionality of caste and gender often consigns Dalit women to the margins of society. This research embarks on a journey to unravel the intricate web of challenges faced by Dalit women in their pursuit of education, with a keen focus on how educational empowerment serves as a beacon of hope to usher them from the peripheries to the mainstream.

To comprehend the present struggles of Dalit women in Haryana, it is imperative to delve into the annals of history. The legacy of discrimination, deeply entrenched in the caste system, has perpetuated social hierarchies that marginalize Dalits, making access to education a distant dream. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report of 2020, crimes against Scheduled Castes in Haryana rose by 8.7% compared to the previous year, reflecting the persistent challenges faced by the Dalit community.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's works and other historical accounts reveal the systematic oppression faced by Dalits, with women bearing the brunt of this discrimination. The caste-based hierarchy, reinforced by discriminatory practices, has curtailed the educational aspirations of Dalit women for generations. Despite constitutional provisions and affirmative action, a substantial gap persists in educational attainment between Dalit women and their counterparts from higher castes.

As we navigate the contemporary landscape of Haryana, it becomes evident that the shadows of history continue to cast a long pall over the educational aspirations of Dalit women. According to the Census of India 2011, the literacy rate among Scheduled Castes in Haryana is significantly lower compared to the general population, highlighting the persistent educational disparities.

The intersectionality of caste and gender further compounds the challenges faced by Dalit women. Uma Chakravarti's work on gender and caste elucidates how Dalit women endure a unique form of marginalization, where societal prejudices intersect to create a multifaceted barrier to education. The prevalence of child marriages and gender-based violence within Dalit communities in Haryana exacerbates the struggle for educational attainment among Dalit girls.

A critical examination of the educational landscape in Haryana reveals a stark reality – Dalit women are underrepresented in educational institutions at all levels. According to a report by the Haryana State Commission for Scheduled Castes, a mere fraction of Dalit women enroll in higher education institutions, perpetuating a cycle of limited opportunities and constrained socio-economic mobility.

While primary education enrollment has seen improvements, dropout rates among Dalit girls remain disproportionately high. Financial constraints, lack of access to quality education, and societal prejudices converge to create a formidable barrier that impedes the educational journey of Dalit women. The Haryana government's initiatives, such as scholarships and reservation policies, though well-intentioned, often fall short in addressing the nuanced challenges faced by Dalit women, necessitating a more holistic and targeted approach.

Amidst these challenges, education emerges as a powerful instrument of change. The transformative potential of education in emancipating Dalit women from the shackles of discrimination cannot be overstated. Studies conducted by N. Jayaram and Smita Gupta reveal inspiring narratives of Dalit women who, against all odds, have broken free from the chains of social inequities through education.

Education not only equips Dalit women with the skills and knowledge necessary for economic participation but also fosters a sense of agency and self-worth. The narrative shifts from victimhood to empowerment as education becomes the catalyst for social change. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019, a positive correlation exists between educational attainment and community development, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to elevate the educational status of Dalit women in Haryana.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The historical journey of Dalit women in Haryana is marked by systemic oppression and discrimination, a narrative well-documented by scholars such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. His seminal work, "Annihilation of Caste," provides a foundation for understanding the deep-rooted social hierarchies that have historically kept Dalit women at the margins. The intersectionality of caste and gender, as articulated by Gail Omvedt in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution," sheds light on the compounded challenges faced by Dalit women, both as Dalits and as women.

Anand Teltumbde's "Republic of Caste" and Uma Chakravarti's "Gendering Caste" delve into the intricate intersectionality of caste and gender. Teltumbde critically examines the caste structure and its persistence in contemporary India, while Chakravarti provides a feminist perspective, emphasizing the unique challenges faced by Dalit women. The works of these scholars underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of discrimination that goes beyond a singular lens.

N. Jayaram's "Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution" and Smita Gupta's "Dalit Women Speak Out: Caste, Class, and Gender Violence in India" explore the transformative potential of education in the lives of Dalit women. Jayaram examines the assertion of Dalits in post-independence India, highlighting education as a crucial tool for empowerment. Gupta's work delves into the lived experiences of Dalit women, showcasing how education serves as a means to challenge societal norms and systemic injustices.

As Haryana grapples with persistent educational disparities, voices like that of K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu in "The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing" provide a literary exploration of contemporary challenges. Dalit literature becomes a mirror reflecting the harsh realities faced by Dalit women in navigating the educational landscape. The tales of struggle and resilience presented by these authors serve as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for societal transformation.

While existing literature provides invaluable insights, a noticeable research gap emerges. Despite the abundance of studies on Dalit empowerment and education, there is a dearth of focused research on the intersectionality of caste and gender specifically within the context of educational empowerment for Dalit women in Haryana. Most studies either broadly address Dalit issues without a gender-specific lens or focus solely on gender without adequately considering caste dynamics.

This research gap highlights the need for a more targeted and nuanced examination of the educational experiences of Dalit women in Haryana. Future research should delve into the unique challenges faced by Dalit women, considering the intersectionality of caste and gender, and explore the effectiveness of existing policies in addressing their specific needs. Moreover, incorporating the voices of Dalit women themselves, as seen in the works of Satyanarayana and Tharu, can provide a more authentic and holistic understanding of their experiences.

In short, the literature reviewed showcases the historical struggles, contemporary challenges, and the transformative potential of education in the lives of Dalit women in Haryana. However, the existing body of work also reveals a research gap that this study aims to address by offering a focused analysis on the intersectionality of caste and gender within the realm of educational empowerment for Dalit women in Haryana. This research endeavors to contribute not only to academic scholarship but also to the formulation of policies and practices that foster inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for Dalit women.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To analyze the historical barriers faced by Dalit women in accessing education in Haryana.
- To examine the intersectionality of caste and gender discrimination in the educational experiences of Dalit women.
- To assess the role of education in empowering Dalit women and facilitating their mainstream integration.

**HYPOTHESIS:** The hypothesis of this study posits that education serves as a catalyst for the empowerment of Dalit women in Haryana, dismantling historical barriers and fostering their integration into mainstream society.

### JUSTIFICATION OF THE PRESENT STUDY:

This research holds significant importance for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on Dalit women's experiences in Haryana, shedding light on the intricacies of their struggle for education. Secondly, the findings can inform policymakers and educators about the specific needs of Dalit women, fostering the development of inclusive educational policies. Lastly, by emphasizing the transformative potential of education, this study advocates for societal change and challenges entrenched discriminatory practices.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study employs a quantitative research design, utilizing a survey method to gather comprehensive data on the educational experiences and empowerment levels of Dalit women in Harsaru village, Gurugram district, Haryana.

**Study Area:** The study focuses specifically on Harsaru village in Gurugram district, Haryana, providing a microcosmic view of the educational challenges faced by Dalit women within this specific locale. This targeted approach ensures a nuanced understanding of the contextual factors influencing their educational empowerment.

Why Harsaru?

Harsaru stands out as a prominent village in the Gurgaon Tehsil of the Gurgaon district, Haryana, boasting a substantial population of 3,140 individuals. The village has a commendable literacy rate of 84.13%, reflecting a commitment to education within the community. With 1,724 males and 1,416 females, Harsaru demonstrates a gender-inclusive demographic composition.

Notably, Harsaru exhibits a higher literacy rate compared to the overall literacy statistics in Haryana. This elevated literacy rate can be attributed to various factors, including its strategic location as part of the cyber city and its proximity to the national capital. These geographical advantages contribute to increased access to education and economic opportunities, fostering a more educated populace.

In terms of social dynamics, Harsaru has a Schedule Caste (SC) population constituting 19.24% of the total residents. The village's social fabric is enriched by a diverse demographic, and this diversity is reflected in the balanced literacy rates among males (90.63%) and females (76.26%).

In summary, Harsaru emerges as a significant locale with a thriving community, elevated literacy rates, and economic vibrancy, making it an apt focus for a study on Dalit women's educational empowerment in the context of Haryana.

**Sampling Technique and Sample Size:** The study adopts a purposive sampling technique, targeting Dalit women residing in Harsaru village. The sample size is determined to be 80 Dalit women, ensuring a representative and statistically significant cohort for the study. The

selection criteria include Dalit women currently residing in Harsaru village, irrespective of age, educational background, or occupation.

**Data Collection Instrument:** A structured questionnaire serves as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire is designed to capture information on various dimensions, including:

- **Demographic Information:** Age, educational background, occupation, and socio-economic status.
- **Educational Experiences:** Access to education, challenges faced, and perceptions about the importance of education.
- **Empowerment Levels:** Perceived empowerment, participation in decision-making processes, and impact of education on personal and societal empowerment.

The questionnaire is developed based on insights gained from the literature review and consultation with experts in the field. It combines closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions to allow participants to express their experiences and perspectives more freely.

**Data Collection Procedure:** the data was collected by administering the questionnaires to the selected participants through face-to-face interviews to ensure a high response rate and clarification of questions to participants which was crucial for participants with varying literacy levels. The gathered data was analysed through statistical analysis using SPSS.

**Ethical Considerations:**

Adhering to stringent ethical guidelines, this study prioritizes the well-being and rights of participants. Informed consent is obtained, and participants are guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The research team is attuned to cultural nuances and power dynamics during data collection, fostering a respectful and inclusive environment.

**Limitations:**

While aiming for comprehensiveness, this study acknowledges inherent limitations. Findings may be specific to Harsaru village and may not be entirely generalizable. The self-reported nature of the data introduces potential response biases, and efforts will be made to mitigate these limitations, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study.

In summary, this research methodology employs a survey approach with a structured questionnaire, ensuring a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by

Dalit women in Harsaru village, Gurugram district, Haryana. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data aims to provide valuable insights for future research and contribute to the existing literature on Dalit women's education.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS:

Findings of the study suggests that 25% of the surveyed Dalit women in Harsaru village have no formal education. It shows that the lack of educational opportunities continues to be a significant hurdle, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. This finding aligns with studies by scholars like Uma Chakravarti, who have emphasized the historical and systemic educational challenges faced by Dalit women.

The study also revealed that only 12.5% of the sample holds higher education qualifications, suggesting limited opportunities for Dalit women to pursue advanced studies. Which reinforce observations (N. Jayaram's ) that access to higher education remains a challenge for Dalits. And despite affirmative action policies, the representation of Dalit women in higher education remains disproportionately low.

In addition to the above the study found that skilled professions are pursued by 31.25% of the surveyed Dalit women, showcasing a diverse range of occupations. This indicates a positive trend toward skill development and diversification of occupational choices among Dalit women. Such diversification is crucial for economic empowerment.

43.75% of Dalit women are engaged in agriculture or manual labor, reflecting challenges in accessing non-traditional and higher-paying professions. It highlighting the need for broader economic opportunities.

31.25% of surveyed Dalit women fall into the low socio-economic status category. The persistence of low socio-economic status among a significant proportion of Dalit women echoes the findings of Anand Teltumbde, emphasizing the deep-rooted socio-economic disparities faced by the Dalit community.

50% of the sample falls within the moderate socio-economic status category. While this may suggest an improvement from low to moderate status, it underscores the need for targeted interventions to elevate socio-economic conditions.



A majority of Dalit women (65%) with secondary or higher education report a higher sense of empowerment. This finding reconfirms that education is a powerful tool for Dalit empowerment, providing the skills and confidence to challenge systemic injustices.

A majority of surveyed Dalit women (60%) report limited participation in decision-making processes within their households. It highlights the intersectionality of gender and caste, limiting the agency of Dalit women. Addressing this disparity requires broader societal changes and empowerment initiatives.

Statistical analysis indicates a positive correlation between the level of education and reported empowerment levels ( $p < 0.05$ ). This reinforces the findings of studies by N. Jayaram and Smita Gupta, indicating that education plays a pivotal role in enhancing the empowerment of Dalit women. Policies promoting education can contribute significantly to breaking the cycle of marginalization.

75% of Dalit women express the need for targeted policies to address their unique challenges. This resonates with B.R. Ambedkar's vision of social justice, which emphasizes the need for policies that consider the specific challenges faced by Dalit women, taking into account the intersectionality of caste and gender.

The findings presented above underscore the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by Dalit women in Harsaru village, Gurugram district, Haryana. These findings are not only reflective of the local context but also resonate with broader scholarly works that have investigated the educational and socio-economic status of Dalit women in India. It is evident that while progress has been made in certain areas, challenges persist, necessitating targeted interventions and policy changes. The intersectionality of caste and gender continues to shape the experiences of Dalit women, emphasizing the importance of a holistic and inclusive approach toward empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

In navigating the complex tapestry of Dalit women's educational empowerment in Haryana, this study has unveiled a nuanced understanding of their challenges and triumphs. The persisting educational barriers and limited higher education opportunities reflect broader societal inequities deeply rooted in historical prejudices. The diversification of occupations, however, signifies a positive trend toward economic empowerment. The correlation between

education and empowerment validates the transformative potential of education. The findings highlight the intersectionality of caste and gender, emphasizing that the journey towards empowerment requires tailored interventions that address the unique challenges faced by Dalit women.

Despite progress, the study reveals that a substantial proportion of Dalit women still grapple with socio-economic disparities and limited decision-making participation. This calls for comprehensive policies that not only focus on education but also tackle broader socio-economic and gender dynamics. The expressed need for targeted policies by the surveyed women underscores their agency and awareness of the intricacies of their challenges.

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