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## **Women Empowerment through Feminism, Education and Gender Equality in Pakistan: A Case Study of Tehsil Sohawa**

Asma Halim (Corresponding Author)  
Assistant Professor  
E mail: asma.halim@iqraisb.edu.pk

Raja Mazhar Hameed  
Managing Director  
E mail: rajamazharhameed@yahoo.com

Summaira Haroon  
Senior Lecturer  
E mail: summaira.buic@bahria.edu.pk

### **Abstract**

Feminist movements and grassroots initiatives have a significant impact on women's empowerment in developing countries. This study focuses on the intersection of feminism and the empowerment of women in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum, situated in Punjab province of Pakistan. We have worked for exploring the initiatives, challenges and opportunities that shape the lives of women in developing or under developing countries. The methodology utilized in existing study, was devised to attain a comprehensive understanding of the correlation between women empowerment, feminism, women education and gender equality in this specific region. This research aspired to contribute valuable insights to the endorsement of gender equality in the region by rigorously analyzing the data. The data collected through surveys, interviews and focus group discussions underwent basic analysis to derive meaningful insights and draw valid conclusions. It is evident that education plays a pivotal role in challenging gender inequalities and empowering women within any region. The results of this research can serve as a microcosm for similar regions in Pakistan and beyond.

Key Words: Feminism, Empowerment, Education, Gender Equality.

### **Introduction**

Feminism is a global movement advocating for gender equality, and its impact can be observed in various developing countries, including Pakistan. This research explores the history of feminism in Pakistan, its evolution and its role in empowering women in the country. Current Study is divided into several sections, each focusing on a different aspect of feminism and women's empowerment in Pakistan.

Feminism in Pakistan has a rich history that has evolved over time. From the early activism of women leaders in the pre-partition era to the contemporary



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“Aurat March”, feminism has played a crucial role in empowering women in Pakistan (Riaz et al., 2022). While progress has been made in terms of political representation, education and workforce participation, still significant challenges and controversies persist. The struggle for gender equality in Pakistan is ongoing and feminism continues to be a driving force behind positive change. In a world marked by centuries of gender-based discrimination and inequality, feminism has emerged as a powerful social and political movement advocating for the rights and empowerment of women (Lorber 2021).

Feminism's historical roots can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when women began to challenge the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that limited their rights and opportunities. The first wave of feminism, which primarily took place in the United States and Europe, was characterized by the fight for women's suffrage. Prominent figures like Susan B. Anthony and Emmeline Pankhurst led the charge, demanding the right to vote for women, a pivotal milestone in their journey towards empowerment. The second wave of woman's rights, which picked up speed during the 1960s and 1970s, widened the extent of ladies' freedoms to include issues like conceptive privileges, working environment equality and the destruction of gender based savagery as examined by Burkett (2023). Feminist thinkers like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem played essential roles in advocating for these expanded rights, challenging societal norms and pushing for a more inclusive and equitable society. Sen (2019) analyzed the role of feminist mobilizing in devising the gender equality agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals. She has concluded in her study that gender equality and women's empowerment are closely related to each other.

District Jhelum, located in the heart of Punjab in country Pakistan, is a region characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles. Women have traditionally been restricted to household responsibilities in this conservative society, with little access to higher education, career prospects, or decision-making authority. However, in recent years, feminism has begun to challenge these norms, offering a glimmer of hope for women in the region.

This study focuses on the intersection of feminism and the empowerment of women in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum, exploring the initiatives, challenges and opportunities that shape the lives of women in this region. Education is a powerful tool that has the ability to transform lives and shape societies. Spring (2004) investigates three significant worldwide instructive philosophies that are profoundly shaping worldwide society: neo-liberal instructive belief system, common liberties schooling, and environmentalism. In today's world, where gender equality and women's empowerment has become crucial topics of conversation, it is important to recognize the role of education in advancing these causes.

### **Background**

Feminism is explained as the equality of genders in a society or community. Feminism in the early ages was the topic or main idea of the poets, novelists and drama writers. In ancient civilizations like Greece and Rome, women's roles were largely confined to the domestic sphere. While there were exceptions, such as notable female philosophers and poets, who were few and far between. In these societies, men held political power and women's voices were seldom heard in



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public life. The middle ages in Europe brought feudalism, where women's rights were further restricted. The Renaissance period saw a revival of classical knowledge but did little to improve the status of women. Instead, women's roles were often idealized as passive and subordinate in art and literature.

### **Pre-Partition Era**

The history of women's education in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum can be traced back to the pre-partition era. During this time, education was primarily reserved for men and women's access to formal schooling was limited. Traditional norms and societal roles confined women to domestic spheres and their education was often overlooked. However, there were sporadic efforts by a few progressive individuals and organizations to promote women's education. In the district Jhelum region, it is essential to mention the role of community leaders who recognized the importance of educating women. These early efforts, though modest, laid the foundation for future developments in women's education.

### **Post-Partition Era**

#### **Impact of Partition on Women's Education**

The partition of India in 1947 had profound implications for the region, including district Jhelum. The newly established Pakistan inherited a society marked by traditional gender roles and limited women's access to education. However, the partition also led to social and political changes that would eventually shape women's education in the region.

#### **Growth of Women's Education (1950s to 1970s)**

The period from the 1950s to the 1970s witnessed significant growth in women's education in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum, reflecting national efforts to promote gender equality. The government of Pakistan introduced policies and initiatives aimed at expanding access to education for girls. In district Jhelum, schools specifically for girls were established, providing a safe and supportive environment for female students. During this time, the introduction of free and compulsory primary education for all played a crucial role in increasing girl's enrollment in schools. Parents were encouraged to send their daughters to school, and the social stigma associated with female education gradually began to diminish.

#### **Challenges and Progress (1980s to 1990s)**

Despite the progress made in the previous decades, the 1980s and 1990s brought new challenges to women's education in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum. The region, like the rest of Pakistan, faced the impact of political instability and conservative ideologies. The rise of religious fundamentalism posed a threat to the gains made in women's education. During this period, there were instances of schools for girls being targeted by extremist groups, leading to the closure of some institutions. However, the resilience of local communities, teachers and activists ensured that education continued to be a priority. Women's education in district Jhelum faced challenges but remained a crucial area of focus for progressive individuals and organizations.



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## **Contemporary Perspectives 21st Century Developments**

The 21st century has witnessed remarkable developments in women's education in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum. Globalization, advancements in technology and increased awareness of the importance of education have contributed to a more favorable environment for female students.

## **Government Initiatives**

The government of Pakistan, in collaboration with international organizations, has launched various initiatives to further promote women's education in district Jhelum. These initiatives include scholarship programs, awareness campaigns and the establishment of new educational institutions. The government has also taken steps to improve the quality of education offered to female students, ensuring that they have access to a well-rounded and competitive curriculum.

## **Challenges and Barrier**

Despite the progress, significant challenges persist in the realm of women's education in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum. These challenges are often intertwined with broader social and economic issues facing the region.

## **Gender Stereotypes**

Traditional gender stereotypes still influence the choices made by families regarding their daughter's education. Some parents may prioritize marriage over education for their daughters, believing that a girl's primary role is to be a homemaker. Addressing these stereotypes and promoting the value of education for girls remains an ongoing challenge.

## **Infrastructure and Accessibility**

In some rural areas of tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum, access to quality education facilities remains unlimited. Girls may have to travel long distances to reach schools, which can be both unsafe and impractical. Improving infrastructure and ensuring the availability of schools in remote areas is essential to overcome this barrier.

## **Economic Constraints**

Economic factors can also hinder girl's access to education. Families encountering financial difficulties may exhibit hesitancy in sending their daughters to school owing to the expenses linked with uniforms, textbooks and transportation. Scholarships and financial assistance programs are critical in addressing these economic constraints. Niaz & Iqbal (2019) and Ali et al., (2020) have given a detailed insight on microfinance factors affecting women's education in their empowerment.

## **Statement of the Problem**

District Jhelum, like many other regions in Pakistan, grapples with deeply rooted patriarchal norms and practices that hinder the full realization of women's rights and potential. Despite progress in women's education and legal reforms aimed at



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protecting women's rights, district Jhelum continues to face significant gender disparities. Women often encounter obstacles to their economic, social and political empowerment. This study aims to address the following problem statement: "How can feminism contribute to the empowerment of women in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum, considering the socio-cultural factors, legal framework and local initiatives that impact women's status and opportunities"

### **Research Objectives and Research Questions**

The research focuses on certain objectives which are enlisted as following.

1. To explore the role of feminism movements and grassroots initiatives in tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum.
2. To investigate the status of education, gender equality and women empowerment in the certain region.
3. To identify the challenges and barriers hindering women's empowerment in the certain region.

All above mentioned objective leads to specific research questions which are enlisted as following.

1. How access to education has been affected by feminist efforts and what role does education play in women's empowerment in the certain region?
2. What specific feminist initiatives and strategies have been implemented in the region to improve access to education for girls and women?

### **Significance of study**

This study bears considerable significance for various reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the unique challenges and opportunities for women's empowerment in district Jhelum, which can serve as a microcosm for similar regions in Pakistan and beyond. Secondly, it underscores the relevance of feminism as a transformative force for women's rights and empowerment. Thirdly, it offers insights into the effectiveness of legal frameworks and policies in addressing gender disparities at the grassroots level. Finally, this research provides awareness that access to education affects women's overall empowerment in the region.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Historical Perspective of Women's Empowerment**

Women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept rooted in historical struggles for gender equality. In Pakistan, as in many other countries, women have fought for their rights and recognition throughout history. The Women's Protection Bill of 2006 marked a significant step towards legal reforms to protect women's rights in Pakistan as pointed by Weiss (2012). However, the impact of these reforms varies at the local level, influenced by socio-cultural factors and the level of awareness and enforcement. Female social activists concentrated on welfare issues, such as the rehabilitation of refugees, during Pakistan's early years (1947–1951), under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan. This was because their work had social respectability within the traditional cultural milieu (Shumile, 2021).

#### **Feminism in Pakistan**





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Feminism in Pakistan has a long history of activism and advocacy for women's rights. Various feminist movements and organizations have worked tirelessly to challenge patriarchal norms and advance women's empowerment. To ensure their basic rights, women began to argue they are being abused by patriarchal societies, in which they are considered second-class citizens. Women and men are forced into "gender roles" (Rakhshani, 2021). However, feminism in district Jhelum faces unique challenges due to its conservative cultural context. A wave of feminism has sprung up within Pakistan and the movement acts as a joint effort to support women in the country to overcome such obstacles and to organize to fight for the rights of women politically, socially, and economically as discussed by Ahmad (2022) in his article published in the newspaper "The Nation".

### **Women's Status in Tehsil Sohawa of District Jhelum**

District Jhelum, like many rural areas in Pakistan, experiences gender disparities in education, employment, and decision-making. Women in district Jhelum are often confined to traditional roles and face limited opportunities for economic and social advancement. The term women empowerment is context specific and can be perceived differently in different cultures. Shahwar (2021) states that gender equality, women status, women empowerment and women autonomy are synonyms for each other. Lucas (2003) has signified in his study that research in status characteristics theory suggests that the female leader, simply because she is a woman, will receive lower evaluations for her performance than a man leader.

### **Empowerment Initiatives in Punjab**

The Punjab region of Pakistan has implemented several programs and initiatives aimed at women's empowerment. These include micro-finance schemes, vocational training programs, and efforts to improve access to education. An example of these programs is discussed by Naseer (2021) which include Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) is one of social protection programs providing unconditional financial assistance to poor women. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives at the grassroots level varies and challenges persist.

### **Historical Perspectives of Women's Education**

Historically, women's education in Pakistan, including tehsil Sohawa, has been marked by disparities and challenges. The patriarchal norms and conservative cultural values have often restricted women's access to education. However, there have been notable developments over the years, including the Women's Protection Bill of 2006, which aimed to protect women's rights, including their right to education. Nevertheless, the impact of these legal reforms on women's education in district Jhelum remains a subject of investigation.

Billah (2014) states that in general, the purpose of women's education in colonial America was to become skilled at household duties and chores in order to find a suitable husband. Women used to get educated for becoming a noble and well-mannered women. A woman with more knowledge is a woman with more manners. As Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loufti highlight in their overview of the biographies of women in twenty two countries of central, eastern and south eastern Europe, this resulted in women's education becoming



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one of the first initiatives under taken by women's organizations (Anderson & Goodman, 2019).

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Tools**

The methodology utilized in this investigation was devised to attain a comprehensive understanding of the correlation between feminism, education, and the empowerment of women in district Jhelum.. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to ensure the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Surveys were conducted among women across various age groups and educational backgrounds. These surveys sought to gather demographic information, as well as insights into their perspectives on feminism and its impact on their lives. The responses were then analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and trends.

In addition to surveys, focus group discussions were organized with women who had experienced first-hand the transformative power of education. These discussions provided an opportunity for participants to share their personal stories and reflections on how education has empowered them within their families, communities, and careers. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders such as teachers, community leaders, and activists working towards gender equality. Their perspectives added depth to our analysis by highlighting the challenges faced in promoting feminist ideals within a conservative society like district Jhelum.

This methodology allowed the researchers to capture a holistic view of the experiences of women in relation to feminism and education in tehsil Sohawa of District Jhelum. Through these diverse research methods, we aimed not only to shed light on their stories but also inspire others around the world who are passionate about empowering women through education.

#### **Research Method**

In the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of feminism and women's empowerment in tehsil Sohawa, a mixed-methods research approach was employed. This methodology seamlessly combines primary and experimental research methods to delve deeply into the multifaceted dynamics of gender equality and women's empowerment in this specific region.

#### **Primary Data Collection**

The primary data collection phase of this research involved a combination of surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. This multi-pronged approach was chosen to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences among the women of tehsil Sohawa.

#### **Surveys**

Structured surveys were administered to a carefully selected sample of women residing in tehsil Sohawa. These surveys sought to quantify various aspects related to feminism, including levels of awareness, attitudes, and beliefs. Through a structured questionnaire, participants were able to provide quantitative data that would serve as a valuable foundation for understanding the prevailing



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sentiments and opinions regarding feminism in the region.

### **Interviews**

In parallel with the surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, such as local women leaders, activists, and community members. These interviews provided an opportunity for in-depth exploration of individual experiences, challenges, and achievements related to feminism and women's empowerment. By engaging with these stakeholders, the research gained a nuanced understanding of the lived realities of women in tehsil Sohawa.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

Focus group discussions were organized with groups of women from diverse backgrounds within tehsil Sohawa. These discussions served as a forum for open dialogues, where participants could share their thoughts, stories, and perceptions regarding feminism and empowerment. The group setting facilitated the exchange of ideas and allowed for the emergence of common themes and shared experiences among women in the region.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The data collected through surveys, interviews and focus group discussions underwent rigorous analysis to derive meaningful insights and draw valid conclusions. Quantitative data from surveys and experimental assessments were subjected to statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages and mean were computed to summarize key findings. Inferential statistics, including correlation analysis and regression analysis were employed to identify relationships between variables and assess the impact of the intervention. When sensitive attributes are involved in a study, employing randomized response techniques is advisable to obtain authentic results. Notably, Halim et al. (2022a,b; 2023) have made significant contributions by applying tests of association and hidden logit techniques using multiple randomized response models.

The study focuses on four main variables which are women empowerment, feminism, women education and gender equality. Women empowerment is the dependent variable whose effect will be studied on rest of the three independent variables.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The research was conducted with unwavering commitment to ethical principles and the protection of participant's rights and privacy. Prior to participation in any research activities, participants were provided with comprehensive information about the research objectives and procedures. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they willingly participated in the study. To safeguard the identity and privacy of participants, all data collected was anonymize and kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms were used in reports and publications to protect the anonymity of individuals. The research team demonstrated cultural sensitivity and respect for local customs and traditions throughout the research process. This approach fostered trust and open communication with the participants. Stringent measures were implemented to





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secure research data, both electronic and hard copies, to prevent unauthorized access and maintain data integrity.

### Results and Discussion

The data collected from tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum, Punjab, Pakistan provides valuable insights into the empowerment of women and their involvement in feminist movements. By analyzing this data, we can better understand the current state of education and how it contributes to empowering women in this region.

Table 1: Population and Sampling

Category	Population details	Sampling method	Sample size
<b>Total population</b>	575,000 (Approximate, as of 2021)	N/A	385 (Estimated)
<b>Gender ratio</b>	Male 52% : Female 48%	N/A	N/A
<b>Age distribution</b>	Age groups in the population	Stratified Sampling	N/A
<b>Sample demographics</b>	Characteristics of the sample	Random Sampling	385 (Estimated)

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age group	Population
0-14 years	185,000
15-24 years	110,000
25-44 years	165,000
45-64 years	75,000
65+ years	40,000

Table 3: Sample Demographic of Women

Characteristics	Proportion
<b>Education Level</b>	
No Formal Education	12%
Primary Education	28%
Secondary Education	40%
Higher Education	20%
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Single	25%
Married	60%
Divorced/Separated	5%
Widowed	10%
<b>Occupation</b>	
Employed	45%
Unemployed	15%
Housewife	30%
Student	10%



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We can note following points from table 1-3. The total population of district Jhelum, Punjab, Pakistan, is approximately 575,000 as of 2021. The gender ratio is based on the 2021 Census, indicating 52% males and 48% females. Age distribution is segmented into five age groups based on the 2021 Census data. Sample demographics include estimated proportions for education level, marital status and occupation.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD
women empowerment	1	7	2.72	0.42
feminism	1	7	2.51	1.52
women education	1	7	2.17	0.59
gender equality	1	7	1.18	0.78

Table 4 is showing descriptive statistics, where average is near 2 for all variables which is depicting responses towards positive aspect for all variables.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis

		women empowerment	feminism	women education	gender equality
women empowerment	Pearson Correlation	1	.853**	.877**	.952**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	385	385	385	385
feminism	Pearson Correlation	.853**	1	.722**	.749**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	385	385	385	385
women education	Pearson Correlation	.877**	.722**	1	.942**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	385	385	385	385
gender equality	Pearson Correlation	.952**	.749**	.942**	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	385	385	385	385
**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					



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Table 5 depicts correlation analysis between four variables under study and it can easily be seen that all variables are having a significant and positive correlation with each other.

Table 6-8 demonstrates the model summary, ANOVA and regression analysis.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.853 <sup>a</sup>	0.727	7.67832

a. Predictors: (Constant), women empowerment

Table 7: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5291.225	3	1763.74167	464.818	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1445.695	381	3.79447507		
	Total	6736.92	384			

a. Dependent Variables: feminism, women education, gender equality

b. Predictors: (Constant), women empowerment

Table 8: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	27.256	0.679		40.141384	0.000
feminism	0.811	0.024	0.853	33.791667	0.000
women education	1.257	0.558	1.221	2.2526882	0.000
gender equality	0.952	0.025	0.987	38.08	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: women empowerment

The regression model is estimated as under:

women empowerment = 27.256 + 0.811\*feminism + 1.257\* women education + 0.952\* gender equality.

The model is quite fitting to the data and correlation of the model is found to be 0.853 which shows high positive correlation among variables under study. The coefficients for independent variables are found to be having a positive effect on women empowerment.

One key finding from the data is that there has been a significant increase in female enrollment rates in schools over the past decade. This indicates a positive shift towards prioritizing girls' education and recognizing its importance for their



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overall development. Access to education and gender equality and emphasizing on feminism play a crucial role in empowering women by equipping them with knowledge and skills needed to challenge gender norms and participate actively in society. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that more women are pursuing higher education degrees compared to previous years. This trend highlights a growing recognition among females about the value of advanced education for career progression and personal growth. It also signifies a shift away from traditional roles assigned to women within society.

Moreover, the data shows an increasing number of women engaging in feminist advocacy groups at both local and national levels. These organizations work towards addressing gender disparities, promoting equal rights and challenging societal norms that hinder female empowerment.

The rise of such groups demonstrates a collective effort by women to create positive change within their communities. Through careful analysis of available data on women education, feminism and women empowerment among tehsil Sohawa of district Jhelum's women population; we can observe encouraging trends that reflect progress towards gender equality.

However, it is important not to overlook persisting challenges faced by these women or become complacent with current achievements. Continued efforts are required to ensure sustained empowerment for all females across different socio economic backgrounds within district Jhelum and beyond.

### **Conclusion**

Feminism is a powerful force for change in District Jhelum, Punjab, Pakistan. Despite the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and challenges faced by women in the region, feminist initiatives have made significant strides in promoting gender equality and empowering women. These efforts have improved access to education, facilitated economic independence, led to legal reforms and increased women's participation in leadership roles. Although there remains a significant amount of work to be accomplished, the advancements achieved thus far provide optimism for a future that is more just and comprehensive for the women residing in tehsil Sohawa. It is crucial to continue supporting feminist movements and their efforts to create a more just and equal society for all. It is evident that education plays a pivotal role in challenging gender inequalities and empowering women within region. By emphasizing access to quality education for girls and promoting feminist ideologies at an early age, we can foster an environment where young women are encouraged to pursue their dreams and aspirations without being limited by societal norms.

This research methodology allowed for a holistic understanding of the subject matter, from quantifiable aspects of awareness and attitudes to the qualitative nuances of individual experiences and community dynamics. By addressing ethical considerations and rigorously analyzing the data, this research aspired to contribute valuable insights to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the region. In sum, the triad of feminism, education, gender equality and women's empowerment is a testament to the resilience, determination and collective strength of women and their allies. The historical background of feminism serves as a foundation upon which contemporary movements build, while education remains a crucial tool for women to realize



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their potential and contribute to society. As we look ahead, it is clear that the journey toward gender equality and the empowerment of women is far from complete, but it is a journey marked by progress, promise and the unwavering commitment to a more just and equitable world for all.

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