

## Encouragement of Women Teachers by means of Gender-conscious Educational Leadership: Viewpoints from NEP 2020 and Savitribai Phule

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**Abstract:** Even while women's involvement in the teaching field is growing, unequal leadership representation and decision-making power continue to be fairly major. This study investigates how gender-conscious leadership helps women teachers to become empowered in the Indian educational scene. Using the theoretical inheritance of Savitribai Phule and the policy goals of National Education Policy 2020, the study uses a qualitative interpretative framework based on thematic analysis and document analysis. The results indicate that women teachers' professional agency, participation, and identity can all be improved by leadership techniques sensitive to gender dynamics. Entrenched socio-cultural standards and institutional restrictions, however, keep fair leadership chances back. The research highlights Phule's emancipatory vision's ongoing relevance in influencing inclusive educational leadership in accordance with current policy changes. It offers suggestions for including gender-sensitive leadership approaches into institutional management and teacher training.

**Keywords:** Gender-conscious leadership, women teachers empowerment, Savitribai Phule, NEP 2020, social justice in education, gender equity.

### **Introduction:**

A major instrument for promoting social equity and gender justice has always been education. Although women make up a large share of the teaching profession in India, their advancement into leadership positions is still strangely limited. This inequality implies ongoing structural and cultural hurdles impeding professional development.

Savitribai Phule's work provides a crucial historical base for grasping the transformative capacity of education in combating gender disparity. Her revolutionary work in advancing girls' education and fighting for marginalized groups transformed education into a means of empowerment and social change.

The National Education Policy 2020 offers a broad plan designed to advance inclusivity and equity in the modern age. Prioritizing gender equality, the policy suggests coordinated initiatives to lower access, participation, and leadership gaps.

This study seeks to examine how gender-conscious educational leadership can bridge the gap between policy intentions and institutional realities, thus empowering women teachers.

### **Related Review:**

**Feminist Educational Vision of Savitribai Phule:** Among the first manifestations of feminist pedagogy in India is Savitribai Phule's pedagogical approach. Her idea of education went beyond reading to encompass the growth of self-respect, critical consciousness, and social resistance among women and disadvantaged groups. She saw education as a transforming power that could upset gender and caste inequalities and advance social justice. Scholars have emphasized that her method fits well with modern views of inclusive and emancipation education, by which knowledge becomes a means for empowerment instead of just information distribution (Rege, 2010; Malik-Goure, 2020). In this way, her work keeps sparking contemporary debate on inclusive teaching and gender equality.

**Women Teachers and Dimensions of Empowerment:** Women make up a sizable share of the teaching population, yet their representation in positions of authority is still poor. Research shows that structural obstacles like gender stereotypes, a dearth of mentorship, and dual family responsibilities sometimes limit their career growth (Mythili, 2017). Therefore, empowerment in the teaching profession is seen as a multidirectional idea. Along with professional empowerment which encompasses participation in decision-making, leadership chances, and organizational acknowledgment—it includes personal empowerment, reflected in self-confidence, self-efficacy, and agency. Research indicate that these aspects are strongly linked; hence, significant empowerment can only happen when both personal development and professional inclusion are concurrently addressed (Huis et al., 2017; Prasetia & Akrim, 2024).

**Concept of Gender-Conscious Educational Leadership:** Gender-conscious educational leadership moves beyond the idea of neutrality and instead actively engages with the realities of gender inequality within institutions. Rather than assuming equal conditions for all, it recognizes the structural and cultural barriers that women often face in educational leadership. This approach emphasizes fairness, inclusivity, and shared decision-making, ensuring that women's voices are represented and valued. Literature on social justice and transformational leadership highlights that such leadership is grounded in ethical commitment, collaboration, and systemic change (Jonsen et al., 2010; Slater et al., 2017). Therefore, gender-conscious leadership is not merely about increasing representation but about transforming institutional practices to promote equity.

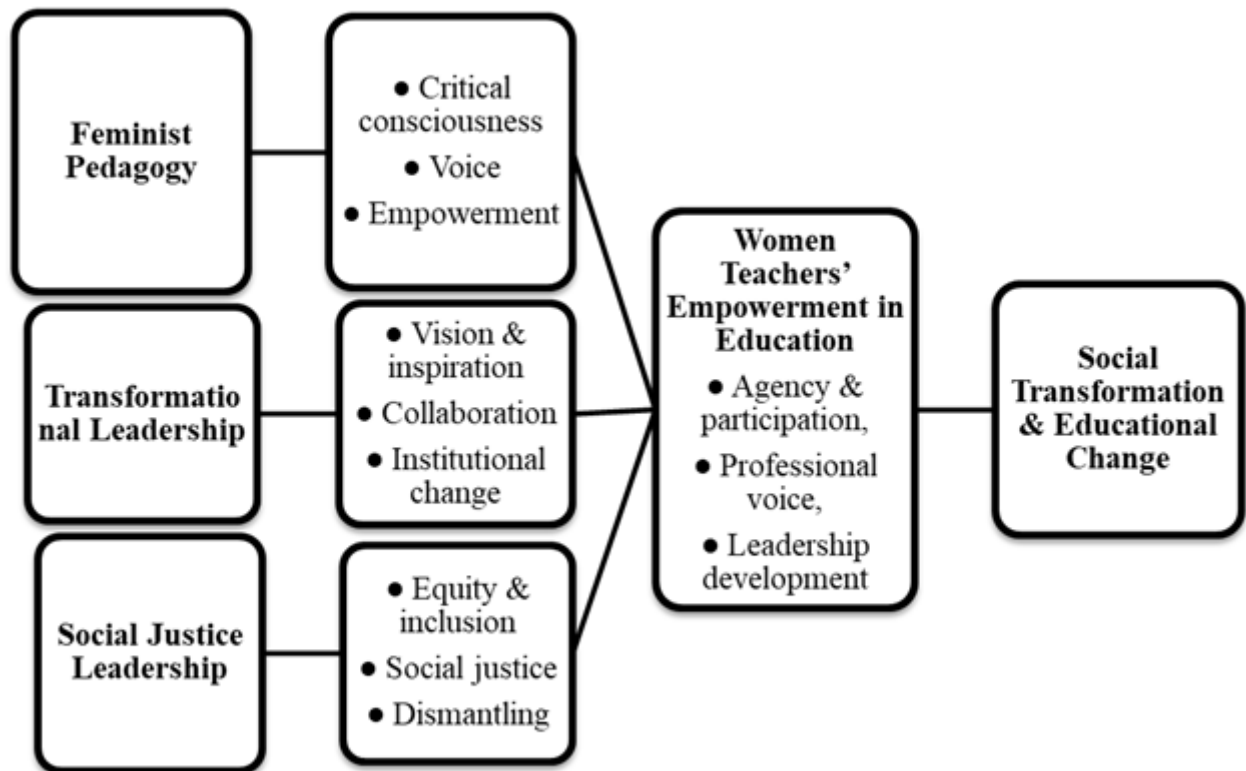
**Gender Inclusion in NEP 2020:** The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places strong emphasis on equity and inclusion, with particular attention to gender disparities. The policy identifies women as a key group within socio-economically disadvantaged populations and proposes several measures to improve their access to education. One of its notable initiatives is the establishment of a Gender-Inclusion Fund, aimed at supporting targeted interventions for girls and transgender students. Additionally, the policy recommends strengthening institutional mechanisms, improving safety, and promoting participation across all levels of education. However, scholars and policy analysts suggest that the effectiveness of these provisions largely depends on their implementation at institutional and grassroots levels (Ministry of Education, 2020).

### **Theoretical Framework:**

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that brings together feminist, leadership, and social justice perspectives to understand women teachers' empowerment in education. Feminist pedagogy provides the foundation by emphasizing critical consciousness, voice, and empowerment, particularly for women and marginalized groups (Rege, 2010). Complementing this, transformational leadership theory highlights the role of leaders in fostering institutional change, collaboration, and shared vision within educational settings (Bass & Riggio,

2006). In addition, social justice leadership focuses on equity, inclusion, and the dismantling of systemic inequalities within schools (Slater et al., 2017). Importantly, the ideas of Savitribai Phule act as an indigenous theoretical anchor, situating these frameworks within the Indian socio-cultural context and reinforcing education as a tool for liberation and social transformation.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Women Teachers' Empowerment through Feminist, Leadership, and Social Justice Perspectives**



This integrated framework shows how feminist pedagogy, transformational leadership, and social justice leadership jointly support women teachers' empowerment, while Savitribai Phule's ideas provide an indigenous Indian context for educational liberation and change.

#### **Research Objectives:**

1. To examine the character of gender-conscious educational leadership
2. To investigate factors affecting women teachers' empowerment
3. To find out the contemporary relevance of Savitribai Phule's ideas
4. To assess the contribution of NEP 2020 to gender equity in education

#### **Research Questions:**

1. How is gender-conscious educational leadership conceptualized and practiced in educational institutions?
2. How does gender-conscious leadership help women teachers in the teaching profession to become empowered?
3. How do Savitribai Phule's concepts influence and mold our present knowledge of women teachers' empowerment?

4. What contributions does the National Education Policy 2020 make to gender equality and leadership opportunities for women teachers?

### **Methodology:**

**Research Design:** Qualitative interpretive analysis was used to analyze policy-based and conceptual data.

**Sources of Data:** The research makes use of:

- Policy papers pertaining to NEP 2020
- Scholarly publications on education and gender
- Historical materials about Savitribai Phule
- Additional secondary qualitative study

**Analytical Methods:** Thematic approaches including the following helped to evaluate data:

- First codework of important ideas
- Organizing under thematic groupings
- Viewpoints via theoretical structures

### **Findings:**

**Gender-Conscious Leadership as a Catalyst for Women Teachers' Agency:** This study shows how gender-conscious educational leadership raises women teachers' agency by fostering participative and welcoming institutional settings. Women instructors in such situations are more likely to participate in decision-making processes, voice professional opinions, and take leadership roles.

This result fits feminist pedagogical ideas seeing empowerment as the growth of critical consciousness and voice. Savitribai Phule's educational vision, which placed an emphasis on education as a means of self-realization and opposition of injustice, fits quite well with the concept of agency in modern leadership techniques.

From a policy perspective, the National Education Policy 2020 promotes inclusive and participatory government in educational organizations. But leadership awareness of gender dynamics will mostly determine how these values are translated into reality.

According to research, women teachers exhibit greater levels of professional confidence and involvement when institutional leaders take inclusive strategies (Jain & Jain, 2024). Therefore, gender-conscious leadership enables empowerment by closing structural divides and promoting professional independence as well as enables empowerment.

**Perseverance of Socio-Cultural and Structural Barriers:** Even with forward-thinking leadership methods, the results show that firmly ingrained cultural standards keep women educators from moving forward. Patriarchal views, gender stereotyping, and household responsibility expectations all restrict chances for leadership and career development.

This points to larger trends discovered in research on women's empowerment, which emphasize the continued impact of structural inequalities on women's engagement in public and professional spheres (Biswas et al., 2020). These limitations work visibly by prejudiced actions and indirectly by corporate cultures that accept male dominance in leadership positions.

By promoting education for women as a tool for social transformation, Savitribai Phule's reformist efforts expressly attacked such sociocultural obstacles. Her battle underlines the historical persistence of gender-based exclusion and the necessity of ongoing efforts to dismantle it.

Although the National Education Policy 2020 recognizes these obstacles, its success depends on tackling these firmly entrenched cultural expectations at both institutional and local levels.

**NEP 2020 as a Framework for Gender Inclusion:** The results indicate that by using policy tools including the Gender Inclusion Fund and stressing equal access, NEP 2020 offers a whole framework for encouraging gender inclusion in education.

This research does, however, find disconnect between policy development and implementation. Although the policy sets lofty objectives, practical obstacles including inadequate institutional capacity, ignorance, and uneven resource allocation impede appropriate implementation.

Strong institutional leadership and responsibility systems are found in studies to help policy measures meet intended results; otherwise, they could fall short (Paswan & Gupta, 2025). Gender-aware leadership is quite important in this regard for turning ideas into reality.

By offering a moral and philosophical basis for gender inclusion, Savitribai Phule's vision enhances NEP 2020. Her focus on grassroots change emphasizes the need of geographically specific and context-sensitive application techniques.

**Professional Identity Development and Leadership Aspirations among Women Teachers:** Another important conclusion is that women educators' professional identity is considerably aided by supportive leadership settings. Women teachers are more likely to see themselves as competent leaders when organizations foster participation and value contributions.

This fits transformational leadership theory, which stresses motivation, acknowledgement, and empowerment as important aspects of leader effectiveness. By helping women teachers see themselves in leadership positions, gender-conscious leaders raise their career aspirations.

The Savitribai Phule's pedagogical approach likewise placed self-worth and dignity two core identity development components in prominence. Her work shows how education can transform personal and group identities, so empowering disadvantaged groups to assert their rightful presence in society.

Still, the results also show that external views and institutional prejudices sometimes limit identity development, therefore highlighting the need of ongoing mentoring and support networks.

**Need for Institutional Change and Gender- Responsive Leadership Practices:** This research emphasizes that enabling women teachers calls for institutional systematic change as well as individual-level activities. Gender-conscious leadership has to be integrated into organizational policies, culture, and structure.

Though institutional practices must match with these objectives to guarantee significant change, the National Education Policy 2020 offers a policy-level motivation for such transformation.

According to academics, gender-responsive institutions are distinguished by:

Open processes for decision-making, Equal leadership opportunities, Supportive work settings (Jain & Jain, 2024).

The legacy of Savitribai Phule emphasizes the notion that education should confront institutional injustices instead of just fit them. Her strategy calls for radically changing power relationships in educational institutions.

### **Synthesis of Findings:**

The findings generally show that gender-aware leadership in education is very important for empowering women teachers because it helps them be more agencies, build their professional identity, and be able to take part in things. However, the fact that there are still social and cultural barriers and that policies aren't always put into place properly makes it harder for these goals to be achieved.

This research finds a clear conceptual link between Savitribai Phule's emancipatory vision and current policy initiatives, implying that combining historical knowledge with current frameworks might help to improve gender equity in education.

**Discussion:**

Using a multi-layered and linked analytical lens, this research investigates how gender-aware educational leadership affects women teachers' empowerment. The discussion goes past mere description to provide a more profound and significant analysis of the results based on the thematic insights given in Table 1: Thematic Coding Framework of Women Teachers' Empowerment and their visual representation in Figure 2: Thematic Map of Women's Empowerment in Education, the discussion goes beyond simple description to offer a deeper and more meaningful interpretation of the findings. In addition, Table 2: Key Dimensions Shaping Women Teachers' Empowerment further clarifies how different factors interact in shaping this process. These components taken together provide a thorough grasp of empowerment as a changing and dynamic phenomenon, relate the results to more general theoretical points of view and policy settings, and help to construct such knowledge.

**Interpreting the Thematic Structure:**

The coding structure shown in Table 1 emphasizes four closely related areas gender-conscious leadership, professional empowerment, structural barriers, and policy context which together affect and define the process of empowerment for female teachers.

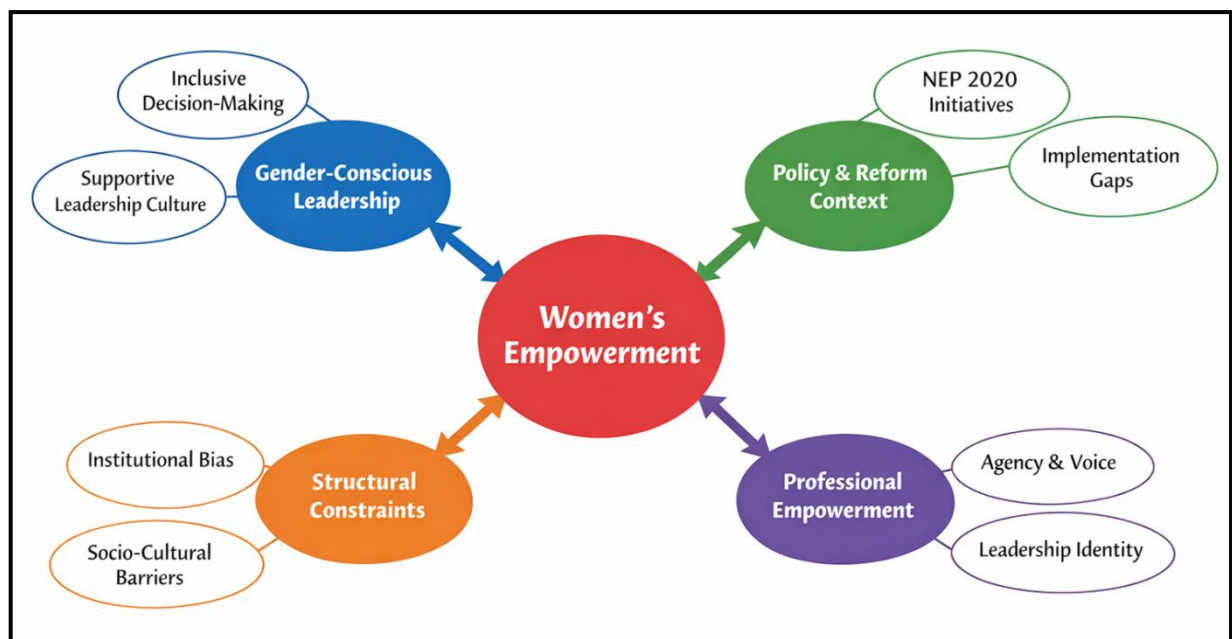
**Table 1: Thematic Coding Framework of Women Teachers' Empowerment**

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Illustrative Interpretation
1. Gender-Conscious Leadership Practices	Inclusive Decision-Making	Women teachers involved in institutional decisions	Leadership becomes participatory rather than hierarchical
	Supportive Leadership Culture	Encouragement and recognition by leaders	Builds trust and professional confidence
2. Professional Empowerment	Agency and Voice	Ability to express opinions freely	Reflects empowerment as autonomy
	Leadership Identity	Development of self as leader	Women see themselves beyond teaching roles
3. Structural Constraints	Institutional Bias	Gendered promotion practices	Limits access to leadership roles
	Socio-cultural Barriers	Family expectations, stereotypes	Reinforces gender inequality
4. Policy and Reform Context	NEP 2020 Support	Gender inclusion initiatives	Provides structural opportunities
	Implementation Gaps	Weak execution at ground level	Reduces policy effectiveness

This table shows how several aspects interact to determine women teachers' empowerment rather than just one element. While professional empowerment reflects teachers' agency and growth, gender-conscious leadership helps to promote inclusive practices and so is supportive. Simultaneously, institutional obstacles as structural limits can restrict opportunities; hence the larger framework inside which these dynamics run is the policy context. Taken together, these areas provide a thorough grasp of the complexity of the empowerment process.

As shown in Figure 2, these concepts are not separate; instead, they work as a dynamic and connected system impacting the job experiences of female teachers.

**Figure 2: Thematic Map of Women’s Empowerment in Education**



Empowerment is at the core of this system; it is thought of as both a result and a continuous process. The thematic map (Figure 2) makes this point even more clear by showing that the main node that is affected by many different kinds of institutional and socio-cultural factors is women's empowerment.

**Transformative Praxis, Gender-Conscious Leadership:** The results show that gender-conscious leadership works as a transformative force inside schools. Sub-themes like inclusive decision-making and sympathetic leadership culture, as Table 1 demonstrates, show how leadership techniques may help to build participative and enabling surroundings.

This fits Savitribai Phule's emancipatory educational philosophy, which views education as a means of social change and opposition against systematic injustice. In the thematic map (Figure 2), this dimension is shown as a main force directly impacting empowerment results.

From a theoretical point of view, this emphasizes that transformation must be gender-responsive, therefore expanding transformational leadership theory. Leadership that overlooks gender dynamics runs the danger of reinforcing current hierarchies rather than breaking them apart.

**Professional Empowerment and Identity Formation:** The results also show that women teachers exhibit empowerment via the growth of agency, voice, and leadership identity. Table 1 shows these components to be at the heart of professional empowerment.

Figure 2 shows this connection by connecting professional empowerment directly to the core hub of women's empowerment. This implies that empowerment is intimately connected to self-perception and identity development rather than only functional. Such conclusions support modern ideas seeing empowerment as either:

**Table 2: Key Dimensions Shaping Women Teachers’ Empowerment**

Dimension of Empowerment	Type	Key Components	Description	Outcome
Internal Empowerment	Psychological	Confidence, Self-efficacy, Self-belief	Reflects personal growth, belief in one’s abilities, and capacity to act independently	Strong professional identity, motivation, resilience
External Empowerment	Institutional	Participation, Leadership roles,	Reflects opportunities provided by institutions to	Increased influence,

		Decision-making	engage in governance and leadership	career advancement, institutional change
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This dual dimension highlights the importance of supportive institutional cultures in sustaining empowerment processes.

**Structural Obstacles and Inequality Persistence:** Even with good leadership, there are still big problems with the way things are set up. The ideas of institutional prejudice and socio-cultural obstacles (Table 1) show how profoundly embedded preconceptions keep influencing women's professional paths.

These restrictions are shown in Figure 2 as conflicting forces, which shows how they limit empowerment. This is a reflection of the "glass ceiling" phenomenon, in which, in spite of their qualifications and experience, societal hurdles keep women from rising to leadership positions.

These results support the case that wider societal change is needed for empowerment; it cannot be attained only by means of person- or leadership-level initiatives.

**Role of NEP 2020 in policy mediation:** The National Education Policy 2020 is quite important here as it acts as a bridge between different ideas. As shown in Figure 2 and Table 1, policy measures give gender inclusion structural support by means of focused interventions.

This research, though, finds a major disconnect between what policies aimed for and what actually happened. NEP 2020 proposes forward-looking steps, but institutional and environmental obstacles make their influence inconsistent. This emphasizes how crucial leadership is in converting policy into reality.

Therefore, policy by itself is inadequate; to get significant results, it needs gender-aware leadership.

**Combining Local and Global Views:** This research's main contribution is combining modern leadership theory with indigenous feminist ideas. The concepts of Savitribai Phule offer a framework rooted in culture that works with international models like social justice leadership and feminist teaching.

The conceptual congruence between: reflects this integration:

- Phule's focus on social justice
- Gender-aware leadership techniques
- Policy perspective of NEP 2020

Placing leadership inside this bigger philosophical framework helps this research provide a more complete view of empowerment.

**A Multi-Layer Model of Empowerment:** Table 1, Table 2, and Figure 2 taken together point to a multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon molded by:

- Leadership methods (enabling factor)
- Institutional arrangements (mediating variable)
- Policy structures (encouraging component)
- Socio-cultural values (limiting influence)

This layered paradigm makes clear that empowerment results from the confluence of many forces rather than from a single direction.

**Conceptual and applied Contribution:** The research extends the body of knowledge by-

- Supplementing leadership theory with a gender-sensitive viewpoint

- Combining indigenous feminist ideas into current debate
- Giving a visual and thematic framework for grasping empowerment

It practically emphasizes the demand for:

- Training in leadership emphasized gender equality.
- Institutional changes removing underlying obstacles
- 2020 NEP and other policies properly put into action

The debate makes clear that meaningful empowerment comes from a change from symbolic inclusion to real transformation rather than from symbolic inclusion. Although laws like the National Education Policy 2020 offer guidance, it is gender-conscious leadership informed by Savitribai Phule's ongoing vision that finally decides the degree to which empowerment becomes a lived reality for female teachers.

### **Implications:**

This research proposes that improving female teacher' empowerment calls for a concerted approach spanning teacher education, institutional practice, and policy implementation. To foster confidence and leadership readiness among female teachers, programmes of teacher education should include gender-sensitive leadership development. Schools and universities have to promote inclusive environments at the institutional level by guaranteeing inclusion in decision-making, providing mentoring possibilities, and resolving gender bias in leadership selection. Effective implementation of policy frameworks like the National Education Policy 2020 should include monitoring systems to make sure gender inclusive initiatives become practical. Drawing inspiration from Savitribai Phule, educational leadership must move toward a more equitable and socially responsive approach where empowerment is not symbolic but actively experienced by women teachers in their professional lives.

### **Limitations:**

- Dependence on secondary data sources
- Absence of primary fieldwork
- Limited contextual specificity

### **Conclusion:**

This research emphasizes that empowering female teachers entails providing them with significant chances for development, leadership, and voice, rather than just increasing their numbers in the field. A potent strategy that turns commonplace institutional habits into inclusion, respect, and shared decision-making areas, gender-conscious educational leadership shows itself. Women teachers are more likely to grow confident, use agency, and see themselves as leaders instead of just members when leadership becomes aware of gender realities. Savitribai Phule's vision reminds us that education has always been a way for contesting injustice and elevating marginalized voices. Her legacy inspires a more humane and equitable approach to educational leadership. The National Education Policy 2020 also lays a solid structural basis to help this change. At the institutional level, policies by themselves cannot effect change unless they are aggressively carried out with sensitivity and commitment. Finally, real empowerment comes from the interaction of encouraging leadership, enabling laws, and a change in society's views. Educational settings can turn into places where women teachers not only instruct but also lead, influence, and motivate next generations when these components converge.

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