

WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Education is a much generalized term consisting of various stages from schooling or elementary education to development of specialized skill and competence. Specialized skill, knowledge and competence come through Higher Education. By attaining Higher Education the individual becomes efficient enough to combat social, economic, moral and cultural issues. In India “Right to Education” has become the rule of the land but still Higher Education is still to achieve a lot. The major glitch is the gender disparity with regards to individuals willing to attain Higher Education. The norms of the patriarchal society even during the 21st century debar women from making up for Higher Studies. The gender gap is truly evident from the Higher Education enrolment ratio for men and women. The stereotype in opting for faculties for Higher Studies also indicate that field of study has also become gender specific. This paper will therefore specifically focus on the enrolment aspect of Higher Education and analyze the trend prevalent with regards to gender disparity in Enrolment for Higher Education.

Keywords: Higher Education, Women, Enrolment, Gender Gap, Higher Education, Development.

INTRODUCTION

Education in the empowerment and the freedom for excellence for the male society is obvious for the whole world. Notwithstanding, the role of education for the half of the population of the women folk is lagging behind. It is especially more concern when talks in the sense of women from marginalized section of society, their empowerment, status, position in the society and the role of education in the higher and other strata of educational field. The present scenario witnesses a decent number of women from marginalized section are in the higher education. The scholarship or financial support and the support of the family are like a catalyst in bringing the change in the status and position of women in society through the promotion of education. The current paper is intended to statistically address and analyze the role of education in bringing out the importance of women and their position especially in the marginalized and minority section of Indian society.

Education is critical for the continuous growth and development of all human beings as well as the society at large. In the present scenario followed by poverty literacy is the second most important concern. Getting educated is no more an option rather it has become a necessity worldwide. It is assumed that if anyone is born as a human being he or she needs to be educated to become a better person who in turn will make valuable additions to their own life and to the society.

In India special efforts are being made by the Government to ensure that every member of the nation has easy access to education. Especially the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17) is considered to be a big push in terms of ‘Education’ where the targeted efforts would also lead towards increased enrolments. Taking about Women ‘Education’ would act as a catalyst in their status upliftment. Since the Vedic period women education has been a major concern in India. Women were always denied access to education which further lead to decreased

empowerment and the right to take decisions and power to lead. Major reason for all this was the social structure of the country where women were always treated as inferior to their counterparts. Post independence the scenario changed and today we have reached a stage where the constitution of the country inhibits equal opportunity for both men and women with regards to education. The literacy Rate of women enrolment has been on a continuous increase. Even though the female literacy rate has progressively increased from 8.86% in 1951 to 18.34% in 1961 to 21.97% in 1971 to 29.75% in 1981 to 39.42% in 1991 it is still below the desired level. When these figures are compared with the literacy rate of males a development gap becomes evident.

Acts like Right to Education have certainly been helpful in raising the participation level of women in education. But the important issue that needs to be addressed with regards to women education is “How important is Higher Education for Women?” It is not just Schooling or secondary education that solves the purpose of individual development. Higher Education leads to a growth in the socio-economic status of any person. Then in an Indian perspective why do Indian women attain Higher Education in lesser numbers as compared to men? Women constitute nearly 48% of the total population and therefore they constitute 48% of the total Human Resource of the country. If this proportion of the human resource is not nurtured properly and well in time the nation will lag behind in speeding up its developmental process. Various schemes are being launched by the Government and especially by UGC to promote and ensure participation of women in good numbers. Higher Education which precedes Secondary Education leads towards development of specialized skills and knowledge. Individuals attaining Higher Education become competent enough to raise their socioeconomic status and solve moral, social, economic and cultural problems. Despite of the necessity of attaining Higher Education it is generally observed that men and women in India do not attain Higher Education in the same numbers. This gender gap is evident from the enrolment figures of Higher Education.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender gap in Higher Education is a major concern and therefore has been taken up for research on various occasions. The regional disparity in enrolment in basic and elementary education (Filmer and Pritchett 1998; Kingdon 2002) gets perpetuated in the realms of Higher education (Chakrabarti, 2009). Gender gap in Higher Education enrolment is higher in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa as compared to states like Goa and Kerala. Pro-women cultural traditions and values and the migration of young men to the Middle East have been cited as plausible factors for this gender imbalance in favour of women (Chanana 2004). Choice of discipline for Higher Education has also been widely studied. Traditionally not only women were less likely to continue with higher studies but they were also disproportionately registered for Humanities (Chakrabarti 2009). Percentage of women enrolment in Engineering (Commerce) degree took a leap from 0.2 (0.6) per cent in 1950-51 to 22.3(36.7) per cent in 2002-03 (Chanana 2007). In commerce discipline as well percentage increased from 0.5 per cent in 1950-51 to 15.9 per cent in 1980-81, rate steadily increasing reached till 36.7 per cent in 2002-03 (Chanana 2004).

Objectives:

The Objective of this paper on “Enrolment of Women: Existing Trends in Higher Education” is:

1. To study the Enrolment rates of Women in Higher Education.

2. To Study the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education for both men and Women for the purpose of comparative analysis.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Women, in the present time, are considered as the potential resource in the development of community and state. The half-of-the population needs to be safeguarded from different dimensions. The education of women have been emphasized at the family and State level by the Constitution of India. The following are the Articles under Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). The commissions have exclusively been established for the cause of women by the Government of India. The Constitution of India provides certain safeguards for the protection of women's rights. These Constitutional provisions are intended for the well-being and all round development of women of all the communities. Our laws are not gender discriminatory and are equally applicable both to males and females. There is no denying the fact about gender equality. However, the practice of gender discrimination is not hidden from any one. Keeping in mind the Constitution framers provided affirmative action in favour of women. The Articles are underlined below:

Article 15(3) - makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women.

Article 51A - (k) in part IV-A makes it a duty of or a guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of 6 and 14 years.

Article 39(a) - states that the State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.

Article 45 - (amended in 2002) gives a directive to the State to provide early childhood care and education for all children till they attain the age of six years.

From the above mentioned articles we infer that it tell about the responsibilities of parents about education towards their children and the accountability of State to take affirmative action in favour of women, formulate policies for all on equal footage including women, and providing early childhood care and education till they reach up to the age of six years. Thus, the idea is to enable child to strengthen their basic development in education to lead the path of higher education and live like a potential and contributory citizen of India. The institutions have also been established to safeguard the interest of women. These are the following commissions for the protection and safeguard of the interest of women.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN:

The national Commission for women (NCW), a statutory body set up in 1992, safeguards the rights and interests of women.

Ministry of women and child development:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal agency for all matters pertaining to the welfare, development and empowerment of women and children in the country and is responsible for the formulation and implementation of women specific programmes in different areas. Religion acts as an important cultural factor, which reinforces the traditional perception of woman as subordinate to males and under male control. The unequal position of women in the family is determined and reinforced by the dictates of the organised religion. None of the major religions-Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity ever conceded complete equality to women and have in fact institutionalised the secondary position of women versus men through written and oral interpretations. Women belonging to the same religion might yet have very different conditions of life, which are influenced by

their earning capacity, employment, rural-urban setup, educational level, and so on. Within every minority groups, some women subsist below the poverty line (BPL), while others enjoy a higher standard of living. However, the case is same here with regards to the treatment of women, the Constitution treats women as equal citizens of the state but the practices in society are quite different. Meaning by the religion and the Constitution calls for equal treatment, and division of labour but practices in society make it difficult to realise.

Declining quality education:

It is widely felt that the quality and standards of higher education are rapidly declining. According to a sample survey of universities and colleges only five of 18 central universities and 33 of 121 state universities received an A grade from the NAAC. The inadequacy of public funds is a very serious problem that the higher education system in India suffers from. It is related to many of the issues mentioned, including falling standards and quality; widening inequalities; the growth in private institutions-specifically profit-seeking ones; the introduction of self-financing courses, even in the best universities; and the increasing reliance on student fees and loans as well as other cost recovery measures.

INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES:

Rapidly changing national and global socio-economic, political and technological conditions, the emergence of domestic and international market forces, privatization, the revolution in information and communications technology, and the powerful waves of globalization, internationalization and corporatization exert multiple pressures on the system, adding to the gravity of the problems.

Market - oriented higher education:

It is indisputable that the liberal economic reforms introduced in the 1990s have had a serious impact on various dimensions of higher education. The whole educational milieu has changed. To put it briefly, the development paradigm has changed from that based on a welfare state philosophy to a market-oriented one-to a less state-regulated and more liberalized economic regime. This affects the development of almost every dimension of higher education. Higher education in India today is in a state of ferment; it faces tremendous challenges and the answers are not clear. Answers, if any, they are not simple. In India, a significant proportion of the relevant population still remains deprived of the benefits of higher education, and the minority Muslims comprise an important category of the deprived communities. According to Census data, while only about 7 per cent of the population aged 20 years and above are graduates or hold diplomas, this proportion is less than 4 percent amongst minority Muslim community. Besides, those having technical education at the appropriate ages (18 years and more) are as low as one percent and amongst Muslims, that is almost non-existent. With marketization of education, there is need to take self-initiative by the minority communities especially Muslims.

Table 1: Overall Literacy and Female Literacy Rate.

Religion, Community/Castes	Overall Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate
All India	64.84	53.67
Hindu	65.09	53.21
Muslim	59.13	50.09
Christian	80.25	76.19
Sikh	69.45	63.09
Buddhist	72.66	61.69

Jain	94.08	90.58
Other religions	47.02	33.19
Scheduled Castes	54.7	41.9
Scheduled Tribes	47.1	34.76

Table 1 demonstrates that minority Muslims are just above the Scheduled Castes in overall literacy rate and female literacy rate. The data, however, is unable to show the quality of education, percentage of Muslim women in higher education. The concern regarding the quality of education is significant because of the truth that the nation lacks in providing quality education. It also does not indicate the level of education among the women. The percentage of women in literacy rate itself talks about the work that is half done. The data regarding the level of education, the percentage of literacy rate of a community and the percentage.

“Right to Education” provides for educational opportunity to all citizens of India irrespective of social and economic status, cultural and age factors. Gone are the days when greater attention was given to schooling by the society as well as by the Government and when the budgetary allocation to Higher Education was kept on declining steadily in comparison to overall outlays. This decline happened over the nine plan period till 2006. It was the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) which was even called the Educational Plan where the Government announced a big push through a fourfold increase in the overall outlays for education including a nine fold increase for Higher Education. But with the end of the Eleventh Plan the same objectives are now in the hands of the Twelfth Plan (2012-2017). It is essential that in order to combat the socio-economic, cultural and moral issues people attain Higher Education. Where primary and Secondary Education creates awareness, resolve queries and generate discipline taking it further on the same lines Higher Education leads to the development of specialized skill, knowledge and competence to deliver what one is meant to. Thus, schooling cannot be referred to as complete education. It is necessary that one attains Higher Education in order to add value to his or her own life and deliver their services for the development of the nation.

Despite of Higher Education being considered necessary for all it is clearly evident from the data available that there have been major gender gaps with regards to getting enrolled for Higher Studies where in the enrolment percentage of women have always been less in comparison to men. Simple data on the enrolment rate of women in comparison to total enrolments done from 2000-01 to 2014-15 shows that enrolment of women for Higher Studies has been increasing continuously but at a very slow pace. The enrolment rate also makes it evident that a major proportion of the enrolment across all the years includes men not women. Therefore, the increase in women enrolment rate is not amplified enough to reduce the gender gap. Surprisingly the gender gap in enrolment for Higher Education where women have been lagging behind is not identical across the country. The data available on the State-wise and Union Territory enrolment of women for Higher Education shows that Lakshadweep (70.06%) and Goa (60.31%) are the leading states with highest number of women enrolled. On the contrary Daman & Diu (39.45%) has the lowest rate. Other States like Kerala, Chndigarh, Haryana, Himanchal Pradesh and Union Territory like Andaman & Nicobar Islands show a higher rate of women enrolment in comparison to national average. But states Bihar, Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Tripuraand West Bengal show a gloomy picture where women enrolment is below the national average. All the states analyzed are part of the same nation then why can't they strive to compare with the high

scorer states like Goa and Union Territory like Lakshadweep. It is essential for the states with low rate of women enrolment to realize that the age old notion of not giving importance to female education and considering females as liabilities is over. If these states can afford to male enrolment then they can even endeavor to promote and increase women enrolment. The best example in front of them is Lakshadweep, Goa and Kerala.

Clearer picture on the enrolment is captured through the Gross Enrolment Ratio or GER. GER is the percentage of those enrolled for a particular educational level or stage out of a given population group. Thus, in order to have a better understanding of the women enrolment status the data on GER was analyzed. The available data on GER shows that the total GER has been increasing 2001-02 to 2014-15. Simultaneously there has been a continuous increase in the GER for women where the highest rate of increase is recorded from 2013-14 to 2014-15. It is inspiring as a nation to see that GER has been increasing continuously over the years. This consistent increase in itself is a signal that women and society are realizing the value of Higher Education for Females. Out of the total women eligible for Higher Education more and more women are striving for higher studies by getting themselves enrolled. But still the gender gap between men and women GER exists. Efforts need to be made to decrease these GER gender gaps. Higher Education entails different Discipline or Faculties in itself and people taking up higher studies can opt for any field as per their interest and capability. Therefore, the trend analysis on the enrolment of women for Higher Education would certainly take into account the Faculty-wise enrolment of women into different fields. The available data of 2015-16 makes it evident that Humanities signified as Arts/Oriental Learning is the choice of the majority of women aspiring for Higher Education. Highest number of enrolment is under the discipline Arts followed by Commerce/Management & Science. But as compared to these figures enrollment in professional and technical courses like Engineering/Technology, Medicine & Law are extremely less. These difference which are not marginal rather huge indicate that women have to work hard to break the stereotype that certain fields like Engineering & Technology are not meant only for men. These Faculties of Higher Education should be chosen by women as per their own interest, career prospects & capabilities as with the help of Higher Education women would give a direction to their career and will be ready to make value addition to their lives and society at large. Therefore, Faculties of higher Education should never be divided on the basis of gender. It is collective responsibility of the family members, well wishers and society at large to help women choose the right faculty for their Higher Education in order to help them attain their goals in life.

CONCLUSION:

The enrolment rate of women in Higher Education clearly shows that improvement has happened over the years with regards to considering specialized education as an important part of 'Women Development'. But the picture still remains bleak. Factual indicators like Gross Enrolment Ratio make it evident that women are moving on the path of attaining Higher Education but the rate at which it is happening is not robust enough to cover the gender disparity and lead the nation towards sustainable development. Out of all the literate women only a handful have obtained specialized education to acquire economic independence, for majority, literate women receive education only to become more eligible for marriage (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). Society at large both at the rural and the urban level will have to understand that today women constitute 48% of the total population and if this 48% is debarred from attaining specialized skill, knowledge and develop caliber to deliver their best, a huge amount of Human Resource will go waste and this will ultimately act as a major hurdle in the development of the nation. It is essential that every girl child is given

complete school education and once that is through she is enrolled timely for Higher Education as per her competence and interest. It is a pre-requisite for the socio-economic development of the women and for the society at large. Fully knowing that the efficient Human Resource is essential for the development of the nation Government and allied Ministries are trying level best to provide ample opportunities for Higher Education to Young India then what restrains us from getting our women enrolled for Higher Studies and give more meaning to their life when we can do the same of our male lot.

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