



GENDER DISPARITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract: India is a country which has become famous for its higher education system. In the last six decades the phenomenal growth in this sector has made it one of the largest education systems of the world. The establishment of the University Grants Commission as early as 1948 indicates the importance that was attached to higher education right from the time of independence. It has been recognized as a powerful instrument of socioeconomic development and efforts have been made to make it more inclusive. Traditionally the deprived and marginalized sections of society, especially women have had limited access to higher education. In this paper the author tries to trace the trends of women's participation in higher education using data from various government sources and agencies. Also an attempt is made to analyze the effectiveness of governmental policies in increasing the access of women to higher education.

INTRODUCTION-

India as a society has always attached a great deal of value to knowledge. Indian history is replete with instances of knowledge being rewarded and revered. The dictum knowledge is power was always followed and people in power patronized learning and learned men. Universities at Takshila and Nalanda were world renowned centers of learning. Even during the present times India is recognized as a knowledge economy. Thus we can say that education was always given due importance and was considered the bed-rock of economic and social development.

Post independent India recognized the need to provide education to all its citizens and the Constitution under Article 45, required that the state provide free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. A lot of efforts were undertaken to provide education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was an ambitious project launched with the intention of achieving 100% literacy rates. But the efforts have not met with the desired success. In order to make education accessible to all the Government of India has taken many initiatives. Education was made a Fundamental Right under the 86th Amendment of the Constitution in 2002. Now in India, the Right to Education Act, 2009 has been implemented for all the children covering the age of 6-14 years. The intent of the government is to make educational accessible to all sections of society.

Objectives of the Paper: This paper attempts to:

- ❖ Highlight the gender disparities in higher education, using evidence from various government reports and national surveys.

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- ❖ Critically analyze various governmental policies for strengthening the higher education system in terms of access and equity.

Methodology: The paper is based on information collected using secondary data sources. Data from National Sample Surveys was taken to highlight gender disparity. Reports from various government agencies were also studied to get an assessment of policies and programmes undertaken for ensuring equity and access to education.

Higher Education in India: India is classified as a country of young people. Demographically nearly 51% of India's population is under the age of 25 and 66% is under the age of 35 years. Such a young population is considered a boon and an asset for any country. Generally called a demographic dividend, it is believed that a young population can drive socio-economic growth. However in order to get advantage of this demographic dividend it is essential that they are trained and educated properly. An illiterate and poorly trained population cannot deliver any benefit to the country. The role of education is thus critical.

The Government of India has consistently tried to promote the growth of the education sector. Today India has the third largest higher education of the world. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the number of Universities/University-level institutions has increased 18 times from 27 in 1950 to 504 in 2009. The sector boasts of 42 Central universities, 243 State universities, 53 State Private universities, 130 Deemed universities, 33 Institutions of National Importance (established under Acts of Parliament) and five Institutions (established under various State legislations). The number of colleges has also registered manifold increase with just 578 in 1950 growing to be more than 30,000 in 2011. There are about 2,565 women's colleges in the country. The numbers speak a lot about the thrust given to this sector. However there is always a quantity versus quality debate, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. We will therefore concentrate on the access that women have to these institutions and how has it brought about a change in their socio-economic status.

Female Enrollment in Higher Education: A Times of India report in 2012 stated that the number of women students enrolling for higher education in India has shot up, and Kerala stands second in terms of enrolment. Women enrolment in higher education which was less than 10% of the total enrolment on the eve of Independence has risen to 41.5% in the academic year 2010-11. According to a report of the University Grants Commission out of 169.75 lakh students enrolled in higher education in 2010-11, almost 70.49 lakh were women as compared to just about 47.08 lakh women enrolled in 2006-07. Among the states, Goa with 61.2% topped in terms of women enrolment followed by Kerala (56.8%), Meghalaya (51.8%) and Nagaland (50.5%). Though Kerala is amongst the 17 states which had higher enrolment of women than the national percentage of 41.5%, the state has actually witnessed a decline in enrolment of women in higher education in the last academic year as compared to those who enrolled in 2006-07. In rest of the states, the percentage of women enrolled was less than the national average, with Bihar recording the lowest at 31.2%. The majority of women in the country are enrolled in non-professional graduate level courses, with 41.21% of the women enrolled in the Arts stream, followed by 19.14% in the faculty of Science and 16.12% in Commerce and Management. The number of women enrolled in faculty of Education was 4.60%, medicine was 3.85% and in engineering technology in 2010-11 was 11.36%. Women enrolment in the faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Science has been miniscule.

The enrolment position of women students enrolled for Master's level courses has been 12% while a very small proportion, that's 0.8% of the total number of students had been enrolled for research. Similarly, only one per cent of the total number of students had been enrolled in diploma or certificate courses.



Table 1 - ENROLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION ACCORDING TO FACULTY AND STAGE										
General education courses										
Year	Ph.D./M.Phil		Arts		Science		Commerce		Total	
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
2001-02	53119	19299	3858475	1688580	1597637	624682	1633693	632170	7089905	2945432
2002-03	63337	23874	4198804	1894759	1770281	705400	1678317	615771	7647402	3215930
2003-04	65525	25250	4252067	1890915	1851506	741660	1755328	645053	7858901	3277628
55352	22826	4241507	1873324	1689504	671223	1587285	578488	7518296	3123035	
36019	14291	4209248	1841682	1809602	752760	1612171	636712	7631021	3231154	
37548	15528	4372872	1902249	1874910	779745	1613090	610694	7860872	3292688	
101044	38891	5263397	2449813	2056675	879059	1916171	743392	9236243	4072264	

Women in Disadvantaged Groups: For example, in 2006–07, the proportion of Scheduled Castes students was 11.8 per cent (4.2 per cent women, 7.6 per cent men) and Scheduled Tribes students were 4.5 per cent (1.7 per cent women, 3.8 per cent men).⁷ They generally join general education courses and are denied access to elite/courses and institutions. Proportionately and numerically access is very limited to them as a whole but more so to the women from these groups. For instance, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women comprised 10.1 per cent and 4.4 per cent, respectively of all women enrolled in 2006–07 in higher education (GoI, 2007: 26).

Education in India, particularly at the tertiary level has most been publically funded and subsidized. Hence the cost to the individual was very low. Still gender gap has remained high. At the macro level the expenditure on education has also increased manifold since independence. Still this is less than what most developing countries are doing. The draft document of the 12th Five Year Plan proposes to increase investment on higher education to 25% of all government education spending, or 1.5% of GDP from the current 18% and 1.12% respectively. An increase of 0.38% of GDP means an additional allocation of about Rs. 25,000 crore to higher education for the Centre and the states together.

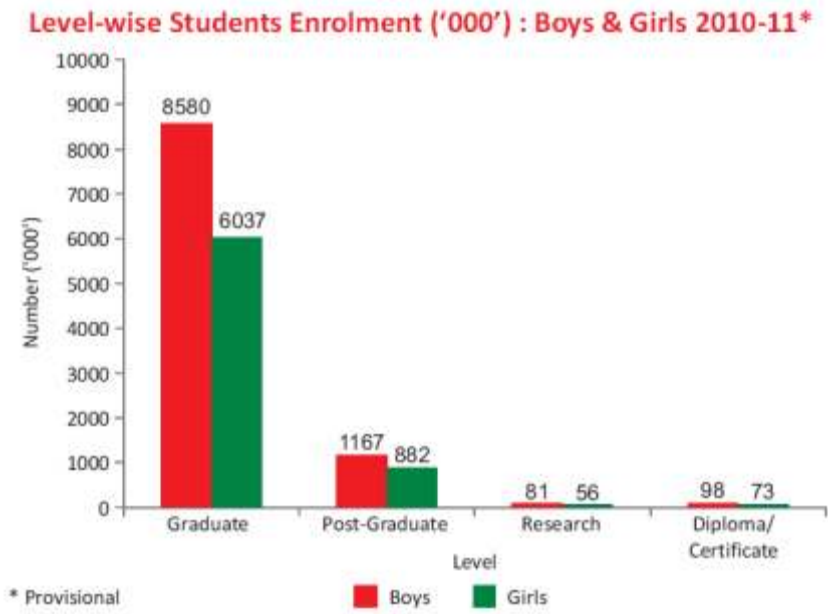
Looking at the enrollment ratios it can be said that access to education has definitely improved

Source: http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/site/India_Statistics.aspx?status=1&menu_id=43

2 - ENROLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION ACCORDING TO FACULTY AND STAGE								
Professional education courses								
State/ Territory	Education		Engineering/Tech., Including Polytechnics		Medicine		Agriculture	
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
02	115265	50111	942377	211654	148309	60242	53969	9064
03	118593	61718	1136786	243239	208465	86690	55367	9332
04	114681	57208	1145622	267797	223235	93831	58700	9981
05	155192	68049	1085236	252492	256748	89052	61838	10585
06	244825	111557	2358638	593383	305629	144903	..	..
07	271858	122144	2530362	631270	319811	150942	..	..
08	370660	198723	1490618	411609	449333	207843	67752	14334



2.1 - ENROLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION ACCORDING TO FACULTY AND STAGE - Concl'd.								
Professional education courses-concl'd.								
tate/ Territory	Veterinary		Law		Others		Total	
	Science							
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2	13821	2872	271007	55980	75126	28154	1504609	418077
3	14765	2982	298291	61947	80745	30564	1913012	496472
4	14858	3138	303629	62523	83721	31637	1944446	526115
5	15721	3387	319671	68596	88041	34298	1982447	526459
5	..	..	..	..	..	..	2909092	849843
7	..	..	..	..	..	..	3122031	904356
8	18221	3880	293996	69165	209959	78392	2900539	983946



Affirmative Actions: The policy of affirmative action has been in place in the Indian Government for a long time. However a bigger question that improvement in access does not necessarily ensure parity in participation and outcomes.

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