

A Study on Role of Higher Education in Empowering Women

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Abstract

Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. India stands second highest in density of population, in which 48.04 percent of female, which constitutes a major human resource next to men. The role of women empowerment is always related with education. As our father of Nation Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi once said "If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family". From his words, one can understand that education is the most essential prerequisite for women empowerment. In fact, the higher education for women plays a vital role in making women an empowered. It brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family and develops the concept of participation. Educated women can contribute to the economic conditions of their home and improve the standard of living of their family. Education not only educates a woman but enables her to take decisions and accept responsibilities at her home and around the world. Even though women have made many advances still their inferior status to men continues to be a global phenomenon. Therefore, the educated women are essential to end gender bias. Here the present study focuses the role of higher education in empowering women.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Education, Inequality, Gender Bias.

Introduction

Women power is crucial to the economic growth of country. Education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. Especially higher education in India is indeed one amongst other elements which has captured the world attention. In India, higher education is defined as the education attained after the completion of 12 years of schooling. Higher education of women has gained a

wider role and responsibility all over the world. Before independence, education of women was mainly confined to school stage and their access to higher education was limited. But over the recent decades, there is a significant progress in the women empower through higher education. Today in 21st century, one cannot afford to ignore the importance of higher education for women any longer. Over the centuries there has been a significant growth in the education and progress of women. Today, more and more women have overcome many obstacles and made an identity for themselves. In fact, there is no women-free sector in India. Education is the root cause for these changes. Some of the examples of prominent women were Mrs. Nirmala Sitaraman, Honourable Finance Minister of India, Mrs. Sudha Murthy the first female engineer hired at India's largest auto manufacturer Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO), Mrs. Arundhati Bhattacharya the first women Chairman of State Bank of India, etc. However, the level of education of women is negligible compared to that of men.

Review of Literature

Senin in 2008 has taken up the schemes of the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Ministry of Women and Child Development that deal with the empowerment of girls and women through education. On the basis of replies to applications for information under the Right to Information Act, the Mid-Term Appraisal of the Tenth Five Year Plan, articles on Pratham's ASER Report and several articles on various schemes and their funding patterns from the Economic and Political Weekly, the researcher have evaluated the schemes with respect to the extent to which they involve local participation, their aims and objectives and their implementation strategies. The researcher have made also recommendations for more efficient implementation, most of which deal with enhancing participation by the beneficiaries of the schemes.

Bhat (2015) focused that Education is the mile stone of Women Empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, face their tradition and change their life. It is most important tool to change the position in society. Education brings reduction in inequalities develops the states of family. Education modifies behaviour in every aspect such as mentality, outlook, attitude etc. Educated women not only tends to promote education of their girls child, but also can provide better guidance to all their children and help in reduction of mortality rate and growth of population. This is supported by another study conducted by Agrawal & Kukreti in 2017, which intended to identify the greatest hindrance in the path of women empowerment and to know the relevance of higher education in women's life. The study indicated that majority of women in our country are uneducated and it is the reason for their downfall and only education can change the scenario as a whole. Also, the researchers have concluded that only literacy is the ultimate solution for empowering women and not only this but women should provide higher education

so that they can be able to make their own decisions and government of India should make necessary plans and policies regarding women empowerment.

Rasheeja and Krishnan (2013), in their study underlined the need for enhanced women participation in decision making bodies of higher education like Universities for their empowerment. In the sphere of higher education in the country, Kerala has the distinction of having the highest women enrolment during 2011-12. This is an indication of the gender sensitization and gender equality in the field of education. However, the programme-wise distribution of the enrolment of higher education, the women were over represented in Arts and Science programmes, while their participation in professional programmes are less than their proportion in the total population of Kerala. The researchers concluded that gender equity is not practiced in this State (Rasheeja & Krishnan, 2013).

Problem Statement

Education will empower women to come forward and contribute towards the development of the country. Empowerment of women will only come through their proper education and employment. Even though women have made many advances, still their inferior status to men continues to be a global phenomenon Mahakavi Bharathi states that “this world can prosper only if women are all educated on par with men”. The previous studies focused on identifying the need for higher education in women empowerment. Thus, the present study intends to analyse the status of higher education in empowerment of women.

Objectives

- To study the status of higher education in empowerment of women
- To highlight the reasons for success and failure of higher education of women in India

Methodology

The present study is based on the collection of data from secondary sources. The major sources of Secondary data are obtained from All India Survey on Higher Education conducted by MHRD, Department of Higher Education, World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Index Report 2020, and from various published and unpublished records, books, magazines and journals. Percentage analysis was used to know the status of women enrolment in higher education.

Status of Women in Higher Education

Education was to be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. The National Education System played a positive, interventionist role in the

empowerment of women. The National Policy on Education of 1968 marked a significant step in the history of education in post-Independence India. It aimed to promote national progress, a sense of common citizenship and culture and to strengthen national integration. It has been acknowledged that the growth of our population needed to be brought down significantly over the coming decades. The largest single factor that could help achieve this was the spread of literacy and education among women. The National Policy of Education 1986 took an even broader view in underscoring the role of Education in empowering women in order to overcome inequalities and disparities. These differences had made an impact on women from the disadvantaged groups. Educating women, therefore, occupies top priority among various measures taken to improve the status of women in India.

Gender Gap Index

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2019-2020 measures the extent of Gender-based gaps in Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment. India dropped four places, from four places, to take the 112th rank in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2019-2020.

Table 1: Details of Gender Gap Index 2020 in India (out of 153 Countries)

| Gender Gap Sub-Indices | Rank | Score |
|--|------|-------|
| Economic Participation and Opportunity | 149 | 0.354 |
| Educational Attainment | 112 | 0.962 |
| Health and Survival | 150 | 0.944 |
| Political Empowerment | 18 | 0.411 |

Source: World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Index Report, 2020

Table 1 revealed the status of low level of attainment of women in the varied field of their attainment. Keeping aside the Political Empowerment, the other three indices is all above the rank of 100. The Political Empowerment ranks quite high may be due to the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments of India providing greater opportunity to women to take part in active politics. This mirrors the status of women in India and gender discrimination in all aspects of life-education, economic activity and empowerment.

Literacy and Education

The table 2 shows the Literacy rate in India during the census periods 1951 to 2011. According to 2011 census the female literacy rate has been only 65.46 percent whereas the male literacy rate has been 82.14 percent. The literacy rate in India for women is low as compared with men. This is also the major cause for the powerlessness of women.

Table 2: Literacy Rate in India: 1951 to 2011

| Census Year | Persons | Male | Female | Gender Gap |
|-------------|---------|-------|--------|------------|
| 1951 | 18.33 | 27.16 | 8.86 | 18.30 |
| 1961 | 28.30 | 40.40 | 15.35 | 25.05 |
| 1971 | 34.45 | 45.96 | 21.97 | 23.99 |
| 1981 | 43.57 | 56.38 | 29.76 | 26.62 |
| 1991 | 52.21 | 64.13 | 39.29 | 24.84 |
| 2001 | 64.83 | 75.26 | 53.67 | 21.59 |
| 2011 | 74.04 | 82.14 | 65.46 | 16.68 |

Source: Census Reports, National Population Commission.

Women Enrolment in Higher Education:

Women's Enrolment in Higher Education has been improved and considerable progress has been made. According to AISHE Report 2018-2019, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 26.3 percent, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male population is 26.3 percent and for females, it is 26.4 percent. The share of Ph.D. student is highest in State Public University (34.3 percent) followed by Institute of National Importance (21.6 percent), Deemed University-Private (21.6 percent) and State Private University (13.4 percent). Share of female students is lowest in Institutions of National Importance followed by State Private Open Universities, Deemed Universities-Government. In the year 2018, 40,813 students have been awarded PhD Degree out of which 23,765 males and 17,048 were females.

Table 3: State Wise Enrolment of Women in Higher Education – 2019-2020

| State/UN | Total Enrolment | Women Enrolment | Women Enrolment in Total Enrolment % |
|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Andaman & Nicobar Islands | 11511 | 6408 | 55.67 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 1760830 | 796024 | 45.21 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 47168 | 23444 | 49.70 |
| Assam | 700163 | 352679 | 50.37 |
| Bihar | 1607008 | 686523 | 42.72 |
| Chandigarh | 99009 | 50443 | 50.95 |
| Chhattisgarh | 586924 | 304139 | 51.82 |
| Dadra & Nagar Haveli | 6102 | 3070 | 50.31 |
| Daman & Diu | 3403 | 1441 | 42.34 |
| Delhi | 1077556 | 527774 | 48.98 |
| Goa | 54680 | 27713 | 50.68 |
| Gujarat | 1478052 | 645106 | 43.65 |
| Haryana | 928893 | 471604 | 50.77 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 283860 | 154411 | 54.40 |
| Jammu and Kashmir | 394099 | 198829 | 50.45 |
| Jharkand | 739484 | 361743 | 48.92 |
| Karnataka | 1988494 | 995077 | 50.04 |
| Kerala | 1095842 | 637642 | 58.19 |
| Lakshadweep | 545 | 418 | 76.70 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 1929344 | 901606 | 46.73 |
| Maharashtra | 4230326 | 1905902 | 45.05 |
| Manipur | 110377 | 55698 | 50.46 |
| Meghalaya | 86931 | 47470 | 54.61 |
| Mizoram | 32838 | 15986 | 48.68 |
| Nagaland | 45462 | 23475 | 51.64 |
| Orissa | 1019192 | 460828 | 45.22 |
| Pondicherry | 77342 | 40448 | 52.30 |
| Punjab | 919576 | 482846 | 52.51 |
| Rajasthan | 2084413 | 1001947 | 48.07 |
| Sikkim | 41572 | 20083 | 48.31 |
| Tamil Nadu | 3414196 | 1677326 | 49.13 |
| Telangana | 1426461 | 725232 | 50.84 |
| Tripura | 82703 | 38247 | 46.25 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 6469367 | 3279847 | 50.70 |
| Uttaranchal | 468255 | 227172 | 48.51 |
| West Bengal | 2097410 | 1040899 | 49.63 |
| Over all India | 37399388 | 18189500 | 48.64 |

Source: MHRD, Department of Higher Education

The Table 3 depicts the state wise enrolment of women in Higher Education during 2018-2019. The total enrolment in higher education in India is 3,73,99,388, which is 37.4 million approximately. In that 48.64 percentage of students were women and about 79.8 percent of the students are enrolled in undergraduate programmes. Also, 1,69,170 students are enrolled in PhD, which is less than 0.5 percent out of the total student enrolment. The above table indicated that the largest number of enrolment of women in higher education were from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Rajasthan.

Table 4: Enrolment of women in various levels of Higher Education in India

| Level of Education | Women Enrolment | Women Enrolment with Men in % | Women Enrolment in Total Enrolment of Women in % |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Integrated Courses | 1,02,470 | 42.50 | 0.56 |
| Certificate Courses | 87,570 | 53.82 | 0.48 |
| Diploma | 8,96,187 | 33.20 | 4.93 |
| PG Diploma | 1,03,156 | 45.91 | 0.57 |
| Under Graduate | 1,46,25,729 | 49.03 | 80.41 |
| Post Graduate | 22,81,192 | 56.43 | 12.54 |
| M.Phil. | 19,069 | 62.13 | 0.10 |
| Ph.D. | 74,127 | 43.82 | 0.41 |
| Total Enrolments | 1,81,89,500 | 48.64 | 100.00 |

Source: MHRD, Department of Higher Education

It is evident from the Table 4, that out of total enrolment of women, 80.41 percent of women were enrolled in the undergraduate programmes. However, the enrolments of women were relatively low in further programmes viz. Post Graduate, MPhil and PhD. This may be due to the reason that, being a female child, parents are afraid to educate their children too much and if girls are educated too much then their parents are facing difficulty in finding suitable groom to their daughters. Also, another possible reason could be there is a lack of interest among girl students to pursue their higher studies.

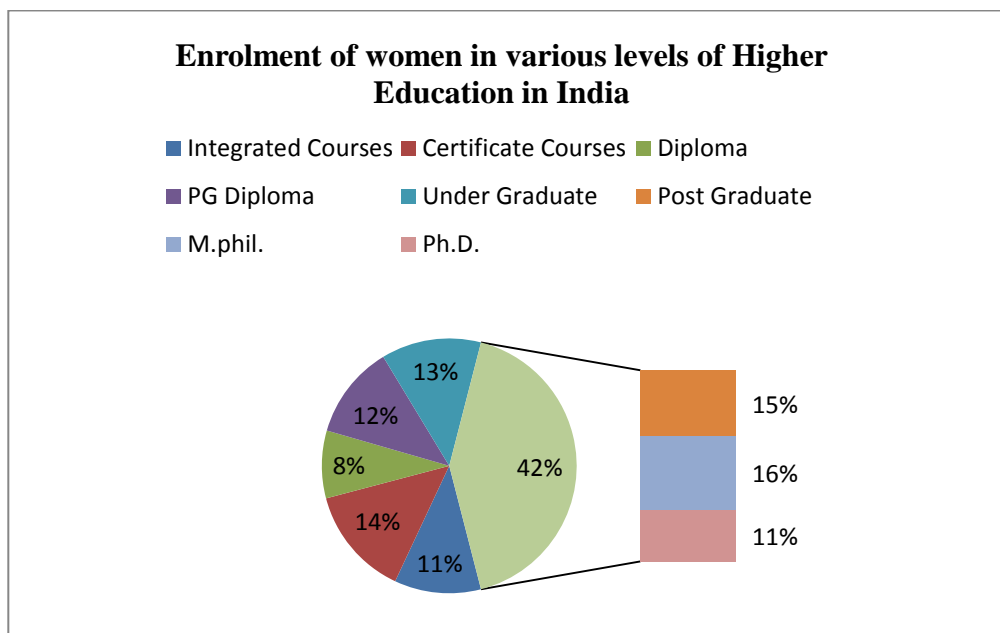


Fig.1

Discussion – Women Empowerment and Higher Education

Empowerment needs to be seen as a holistic outcome of the processes of critical education that enables women to lead autonomous lives and freedom to act. Higher education is the gateway to economic security and opportunity particularly for women in India. Moreover, it helps the women not only in gaining knowledge but also enables her to earn a living. Education makes the women self-sufficient in every aspect, wherein she is not depend upon her father, husband neither children nor siblings. The higher education helps women to have a better understanding of social and political processes beyond the home in far-reaching social structure and makes her a wise citizen with effective social and political action. The complete living includes, being physically strong, earning a living, being a responsible parent and an earnest citizen. The education embraces an individual to stay away from hurdles, wherein in case of women it should give them equal rights in social, political, cultural, gender and religious aspects respectively.

The Government of India is committed towards encouraging girl students for taking up higher studies under various schemes in accordance with aforesaid aspects for fostering gender equality are indicated below:

- a) Higher education of women through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Mode.
- b) Post School Diploma (Polytechnics etc.): To provide financial assistance for the construction of women hostel in the existing polytechnics.

- c) The University Grants Commission (UGC) has launched a number of schemes to encourage the enrolment and promotion of girls in Higher Education.
- d) Day Care Centres in Universities and Colleges.
- e) Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child for Pursuing.
- f) Higher and Technical Education. Construction of Women's Hostels for Colleges.
- g) Development of Women's Studies in Universities and Colleges.
- h) Scheme of Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education.
- i) Post-Doctoral Fellowships for Women.
- j) The University Grants Commission (UGC) has two specific schemes for promotion of Women's Studies in Universities & Colleges namely: Development of Indian Studies in Indian Universities & Colleges and Capacity Building and Women Managers in Higher Education.
- k) For supporting single girl child, special scholarship schemes are there namely: Post-Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child and Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child Scholarship for Research in Social Science.
- l) UGC has special schemes for promotion of women hostels in Universities and Colleges and establishment of Day Care Centres therein.
- m) UGC has provided support for eight exclusive women universities.
- n) The All India Council for Technical Education is implementing the PRAGATI scholarship scheme for assistance of girls pursuing technical education.
- o) To improve female enrolment in the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), the Government has decided to increase female enrolment in B. Tech. Programmes of IITs from the current 8-14 percent in 2018-19, 17 percent in 2019-20 and 20 percent in 2020-21 by creating supernumerary seats.
- p) The Government has also decided to increase female enrolment from existing 14 percent to 20 percent over a period of 2-4 years by creating supernumerary seats in undergraduate programmes of National Institute of Technology and Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology, Shibpur.

Factors Influencing Higher Education of Women in India

The main factors influencing women's success and failure in higher education are listed below:

Success

- a) Women are strongly motivated to succeed in the education stream.
- b) The merit basis of the education system permits females to excel.
- c) Prejudice against women's education has been reduced. Higher Education has come to be considered equivalent to a bride's "dowry".

- d) Women universities promote Higher Education.
- e) Women's expectations for education based employment are high.
- f) Some Higher Education courses provide scholarship facilities for women.
- g) Female students have been provided with residential facilities in some areas
- h) Women's education often spreads this way, more specifically through same sex effects. i.e. an educated woman is far more likely to send her daughter to school than an uneducated woman.

Failure

- a) Female students have difficulties in access to transport facilities in general.
- b) Sexual harassment as well as occasional student violence hinders female student's completion of higher education.
- c) Marriage in many cases leads to early withdraw or dropouts.
- d) Gender stereotyping inhibits completion of studies.
- e) Financial constraints can cause withdrawal or dropout from the education stream.
- f) Part-time work to earn living intervenes with higher studies.

Suggestions

The government should increase the transport facilities for women students. There is a need to increase the no. of women professors in co-education colleges too. Quality of Education is very important for the empowerment of women. The researcher has already noted that in the total enrolment of women in various levels of programmes, 80.41 percent women were enrolled in under graduate courses. The under graduate course is just the beginning of Higher Education. In this course, many of the students were applying their school learning method i.e. just by-hearing the subjects. This type of education never facilitates to achieve the empowerment, wherein women students have to understand the concepts. Therefore, the learning method should be modified. The government and educational institutions has to take necessary steps to increase the enrolment of women in higher education programmes viz. Post Graduate, MPhil and PhD respectively.

Conclusion

The women enrolment in Higher Education is increasing in almost all the states of India. But the rate of increase is slow while compare to men. Higher education plays vital role in bringing out the empowerment of women. The equal participation of women in higher education will help India make a vital contribution to sustainable development. International Convention in all forms of Discrimination against Women (ICDAW) in 1993 mentioned that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and

self-confidence, necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educating women benefit the whole society.

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