



Higher education: a step forward to women empowerment

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Abstract: The growing social awareness across the globe has brought a number of issues to the fore among which gender equality and empowerment of women are very significant. Discrimination against women in the form of male-female differentiation constitutes the core of the gender biased system. Education is the biggest liberating force and rise in the levels of education, which nourishes progressive outlook, and the advent of industrialization and modernization have effected a sea change in the attitudes and thinking pattern of the people. Higher education provides an opportunity to women to improve their knowledge and skills. The higher level learning will also help them to play an effective role in the whole society. Indian women generally faced all types of barriers to success like illiteracy, domestic violence, lack of motivation and support and many more. India is country where man dominance in the society prevails. It is very essential for the harmonious development of the country that women should go hand by hand and shoulder to shoulder with men. And for empowering the women, higher education will play a vital role. This paper attempts to illustrate the current status of women in Higher Education in India and also to explore the possibilities and opportunities for women's empowerment in India.

Key words: Empowerment, Enrolment Status, Higher Education, Hindrance of Women Empowerment, Role of Universities.

INTRODUCTION:

Women empowerment is one of the highly discussed issues in contemporary development discourses in developing countries. Women power has been given top most place in our Indian culture and society since Vedic period. Degradation in cultural and moral values in recent time, women are now victim of many social and economic evils. They are being exploited in all spheres of life. The gender disparities in all walks of life is on increase, say-education, economic, social, health care and decision making process. This widening gap is the sole reason behind backwardness of women and subordination. Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potential. Women should remember that they are also rational, intelligent and thinking human beings. The concept and the means of achieving women's empowerment nevertheless are still in discursive formation. The study attempts to assess whether



the intensive aspects like higher education is able to promote women centric development and empower the working women.

OBJECTIVES:

The main objectives of this paper are:

- To highlight year wise women enrolment in higher education in India.
- To identify year wise establishment of girls' colleges in India
- To know the relevance of higher education in women's life.
- To identify the greatest hindrance in the path of women empowerment.

METHODOLOGY:

This paper is theoretical in nature. This paper is basically descriptive. In this paper attempt has been taken to analyse the importance of higher education for women in India. The sources used in it are purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

EMPOWERMENT:

Empowerment may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. The Oxford American Dictionary defines "empowerment" as "to make (someone) stronger and more confident, esp. in controlling their life and claiming their rights". Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them.

HIGHER EDUCATION:

Higher Education is the aggregate of systematized knowledge and practical skills that allow theoretical and practical problems to be solved by a given type of training, utilizing and creatively developing the modern achievements of science, technology, and culture. The term "higher education" is also applied to the training of highly skilled specialists in the fields of economics, science, technology, and culture at various types of higher schools, which accept persons who have successfully completed secondary general-education schools or secondary specialized-education institutions. Higher education is the stage of learning that occurs at universities, academies, colleges, seminaries, and institutes of technology. Higher education also includes certain college-level institutions, such as vocational schools, trade schools, and career colleges that award academic degrees or professional certifications. It should be noted that the definition of higher education could vary from country to country.

STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA:

In the Indian system, higher education includes the education imparted after the 10+2 stage. In simple parlance, it is degree education and post degree education which we conduct in our colleges and universities.



GENDER:

“Gender refers to the socially constructed role of women and men. It is a social and not a physiological concept”(2000). In this paper the term ‘gender’ has been used to indicate the masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour, pattern, roles and responsibilities. Whereas ‘sex’ is biologically constructed and cannot be changed, ‘gender’ is culturally and can be changed.

GENDER EQUITY:

Gender equity “recognizes that women and men have different need, preferences, and interests that equality of outcomes may necessitate different treatment of men and women”(Reeves and Beden 2000). This means “fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs which includes equal treatment considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities”.

GENDER EQUALITY:

Gender equality starts with equal valuing of girls and boys. This means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefitting from, economic, social, cultural and political development. It is therefore the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women and the role they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society.

NEED OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision-making power of their own
- Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- Having positive thinking on the ability to make change
- Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
- Ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means.
- Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Empowering women in developing countries like India is essential to reduce global poverty since women represent most of the world's poor population. Eliminating a significant part of a nation's work force on the sole basis of gender can have detrimental effects on the economy of that nation. In addition, female participation in counsels, groups, and businesses is seen to increase efficiency. Most women across the globe rely on the informal work sector for an income. If women were empowered to do more and be more, the possibility for economic growth becomes apparent.



WOMEN'S EDUCATION:

Today, women's education has become an issue of debate within which it is now necessary to shift the focus from women's intellectual development to women's autonomy in decision-making, freedom of expression and control over resources. The time has arrived to realize the relevance, in a rapidly developing country like India, of education for leadership-building, especially for women something which can be achieved only through Higher Education. The main challenge to women's Higher Education is to provide gender-fair education to all citizens. Empowerment is the manifestation of a redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology, transforming the institutions that reinforce or perpetuate gender discrimination. The parameters of empowerment have been identified as

- Developing ability for critical thinking;
- Fostering decision-making and action through collective processes;
- Ensuring equal participation in developmental processes;
- Enhancing self-esteem and self confidence in women.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE:

The Indian National Policy on Education (NPE) is a landmark in the approach to women's education when it proclaims: "The Education System will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators'. The programme implementation explains women's empowerment through collective reflection and decision-making.

For this Higher Education needs to take responsibility for:

- Cultivation of positive self-image and self-confidence;
- Developing capacity for critical thinking;
- Developing leadership qualities
- Achieving group cohesion and fostering decision-making and action;
- Providing women's centers in Agricultural and Home Science Colleges;
- Providing Continuing Education and Correspondence Centers for organizing vocational and literary skills;
- Revamping the Industrial Training Institutes in terms of diversification of trades and courses, keeping in view the job potential, facilities for vocational counseling, imparting information about credit, banking, entrepreneurial development and access to women's technical education;
- Providing Women's Studies Research centers to identify issues and areas and organize seminars and workshops to discuss and analyze women-related issues and disseminate



information and encourage interaction with students and the general public through the media';

- Providing classes on legal literacy, programmes for women's socio- economic development delivered via media, adult education and information and training support;
- A more relevant and responsive curriculum catering to the cultural and occupational needs of women;
- Meeting the expenses of higher education for the rural, backward sections with incentives like scholarships and frees places;
- Meeting the requirement of achieving full integration of women within the democratic and developmental efforts of the country.

ENROLMENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA:

Women empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political rights are the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. Education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, confront their traditional role and change their life. India can hope to be a developed country only when the women of the nation have become empowered.

STATE/UT WISE ANALYSIS OF WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

TABLE -1

SL.	STATE/UT	% OF FEMALE STUDENTS ENROLMENT IN RESPECT OF TOTAL ENROLMENT
1.	Goa (UT)	60.31
2.	Daman Diu (UT)	59.11
3.	Kerala	58.62
4.	A &N Island (UT)	58.37
5.	Meghalaya	54.19
6.	Pondicherry (UT)	51.52
7.	Himachal Pradesh	51.16
8.	Chandigarh	50.38
9.	Punjab	49.68
10.	Nagaland	49.08
11.	Sikkim	48.02
12.	Mizoram	47.85
13.	Assam	47.79
14.	D & N Haveli (UT)	46.98
15.	Tamil Nadu	46.45
16.	Delhi	46.33
17.	Jammu & Kashmir	46.01



18.	Karnataka	45.81
19.	Haryana	44.13
20.	Maharashtra	43.90
21.	Manipur	43.68
22.	Gujarat	43.52
23.	Tripura	42.30
24.	Uttar Pradesh	41.26
25.	Uttarakhand	40.97
26.	Odessa	40.93
27.	West Bengal	40.82
28.	Lakshadweep (UT)	40.79
29.	Andhra Pradesh	39.93
30.	Jharkhand	38.61
31.	Rajasthan	38.54
32.	Madhya Pradesh	37.88
33.	Chhattisgarh	37.18
34.	Arunachal Pradesh	36.69
35.	Bihar	36.69

Source: UGC Annual Report 2013

Analysis: India occupied 3rd largest education system in the world, but only four states (Goa, Kerala, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh) and 4 UTs (Daman, Diu, A&N Island, Pondicherry, & Chandigarh) have been crossed the 50% women enrolment in respect of total enrolment. West Bengal with the population of 91 million is the fourth largest state in India and seventh largest sub-national entity in the world, but it has occupied 27th ranks among the states / UTs ranking.

GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO IN HIGHER EDUCATION (18-23 yrs):

TABLE -2

	2010-11	2011-12	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
MALE	20.8	21.6	22.7	25.3	25.4	26.0
FEMALE	17.9	18.9	20.1	23.2	23.5	24.5
TOTAL	19.4	20.4	21.5	24.3	24.5	25.2

Source: AISHE

Analysis: Table no 2 shows that female enrolment ratio in higher education has been increasing in the session 2014-15 in compare to other sessions. But in the session, 2015-16 shows that female enrolment ratio is very low than other sessions. This table also shows that in the session 2010-11 the gender gap in gross enrolment ratio in higher education was high in comparison to 2016-17 sessions.



ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Higher education definitely raises women's status whether she contribute in the income of the family or not. She can be at par with men. Majority of the women in our country are uneducated that is why they are suppressed. It is the duty of school teachers to tell them that becoming a wife is not their ultimate goal. Their standing up on their feet and being something is important. Higher Education can bring phenomenal change in women's life resulting in social transformation in the long run by inculcating following attributes among them:

1. Enhancing their confidence
2. Raising their status in the family and society
3. Bring awareness about their rights
4. Boosting their self esteem
5. Increasing their self efficacy
6. Reducing their dependency
7. Better upbringing of their children
8. Enhancing their mobility
9. Opening career opportunities

Increased knowledge, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity are indicators of empowerment process (Murphy-Graham, 2008). There is evidence that these components are usually developed during and as a result of higher education (Maslak and Singhal, 2008). Women, who are educated and earning, are in much better position in our society as compared to uneducated women worker. This is a commonly understood view about the role of education in transforming women.

YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF COLLEGES IN INDIA:

TABLE -3

YEAR	Total Colleges in India	Total Women Colleges in India	% of Women Colleges in Respect of Total College in India
1970-71	3604	412	11.43
1980-81	4722	609	12.90
1990-91	7346	874	11.90
2000-01	12806	1578	12.32
2010-11	33023	3982	12.06
2011-12	35539	4266	12.00

Source: UGC Annual Report, Annual Report of Department Of Higher Education in West Bengal.



Analysis:Table no 3 shows that, maximum number of women's colleges were established in the period of 2011- 12 it was 4266. Highest women colleges (12.90%) were established in respect of total college establishment in the period of 1980-81.

ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES: EMPOWERING AGENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION:

To be effective agents of empowerment through Higher Education, universities need to give attention to:

- Mass motivation and mobilization – dissemination of information through newsletters and other social agencies;
- Literacy Promotion: preparation of training packages and development of learning materials;
- Techno–pedagogic inputs: Preparation of data based information and transference of matter into technological display;
- Network Culture: monitor activities related to women’s studies and women’s movements and recommend better implementation.

HINDRANCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT & HIGHER EDUCATION:

Recent studies show that women face more barriers in the workplace than do men. Gender-related barriers involve sexual harassment; unfair hiring practices, career progression, and unequal pay where women are paid less than men are for performing the same job. Such barriers make it difficult for women to advance in their workplace or receive fair compensation for the work they provide. Gender discrimination has been a major obstacle in granting equal opportunity for women in Higher Education. It has been identified as a crucial category and deserves attention in the education-equality paradigm. Structural barriers in-

1. The economic, social, political and environmental spheres produce and reinforce these inequalities. Obstacles to women’s economic and political empowerment, and violence against women and girls, are barriers to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights, gender equality, justice and peace.
2. Across much of the world, either by law or custom, women are still denied the right to own land or inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend school, earn income and progress in their profession free from job discrimination.
3. Women are significantly under-represented in decision-making at all levels.
4. While the economic benefits of educating girls are similar to those of educating boys, recent findings suggest the social benefits are greater.
5. Women have the potential to change their own economic status and that of their communities and countries in which they live yet usually women’s economic contributions are unrecognized, their work undervalued and their promise under-nourished.



Education is the most powerful instrument for changing women's position in society. There are many hindrances in the path of women empowerment and in higher education. Some of them are as follows-

- Lack of education.
- Financial constraints.
- Family responsibility.
- Low mobility.
- Low ability to bear risk.
- Low need for Achievement.
- Absence of Ambitions for the Achievement.
- Social status.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. There seemed to be a slight improvement in women's involvement in household decision-making in male-headed households, on such issues as credit, the disposal of household assets, children's education, and family health care. However, the traditional gender-based divisions persist in intra-household decision-making. Women basically decide on food preparation, and men make the financial decisions. But group members had become more aware of their property and political rights (which was part of group training). As in the case of mobility and social interaction, the evaluation again found greater improvements among women heads of households, older women, and more educated women. To empower a female "...sounds as though we are dismissing or ignoring males, but the truth is, both genders desperately need to be equally empowered." Empowerment occurs through improvement of conditions, standards, events, and a global perspective of life.

GENDER FAIR EDUCATION:

Gender-fair education involves an aggressive move away from emphasis on separate and complementary spheres for men and women and on gender-stereotyped careers to expanded options and outcomes. The attainment of equality, rights, and empowerment should not be accidental or simply an offshoot of a good education but rather an explicit, overarching goal in a healthy social environment. Some major instruments of gender-fair education are identification and projection of role models among faculty, administrators, and alumnae; systematic inclusion of women among speakers and resource persons. The challenge of gender-fair women's Higher



Education should be the transformation of women's lives as well as the transformation of society itself.

INITIATIVES TAKEN FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA:

- Schemes of National Schedule Tribes Finance and Development Corporation
- Integrated Child Development Scheme.
- National Rural Health Mission.
- Janani Suraksha Yojana.
- Integrated Child Protection Scheme.
- Swadhar-A scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances.
- Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY)
- Ujjawala- a scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration.
- Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana .
- Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana- A conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme.
- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls.
- STEP- Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women.
- Scheme for Working Women Hostel.
- Indira Awaas Yojana.
- National Mission for Empowerment of Women.

CONCLUSION:

Now that we are out of those dark ages, women are more empowered to do whatever they want. This means that they have the ability to choose their own destiny, job, vote, and do anything a man can do. Dependent women are not empowered women. If women think just that being highly educated and employed they are empowered, it is a myth. Women have to awake from deep slumber and understand the true meaning of empowerment. Everyone must understand that empowering women doesn't mean empowering them in technical area only. Higher education plays a vital part in national development and this includes the advancement of women. Higher education helps women in two ways. It enables qualified women to become leaders in society and allows them to become role model for younger girls. It is cleared that only literacy is not the ultimate solution but women should be highly educated to know their rights and duties. And should be able to use their rights as per the need. But it is also mandatory that there should proper implementations what policies are made and what government of India has made different programmes regarding women empowerment.



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