"WOMEN'S ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM"

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ABSTRACT- Education of women is in a state of crisis in all over world and women as compared to men have limited chance and access to higher education. This at once brings to the forefront the question of higher education because in the hierarchical span of education, higher education is at the top and serves as the entry point to gainful employment. The present enquiry is an attempt to find out the situation of women's access to higher education as compared to men. Gender inequality is the serious problem for all the developing countries, where majority of women have been sufferers of social, cultural, political and environmental impacts of development. Lack of education is the most vital cause behind these inequalities. India is moving towards 21st century with a vision to be a part of economic superpowers. Education is the basis for the development of any nation. Education for all is one of the criteria through which the developmental goals of any country could be assessed and evaluated. Open and Distance Learning have been increasingly promoted as a key solution for the historically disadvantaged group i.e. Women. It has emerged as a tool for accessing higher education for women.

Keywords- Women's Access, Higher Education, Open and Distance Learning, Removes barriers to access.

Introduction:

Woman, the first school of the child, constitutes roughly one half of the world population. But their social, economic and political status is lower than that of men in almost all the countries of the world. Of course women do enjoy better position in some societies than in others, but their overall position everywhere is lower than that of their male counterparts Woman can make meaningful contribution to the society if they are educated and have access to higher education, which serves as entry point to gainful employment. Gaia Wisker quotes in her book Empowering Women in Higher Education.

Education of women is in a state of crisis in India and women as compared to men have limited chance and access to education. The eighth five year plan of India (1992- 97) states It is now widely accepted that women make a very important contribution to the economy through their participation in agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors women Gulag behind men in employment and to enable them to catch up, special efforts are

being made to improve their education skills and employment. This includes creation of education and training facilities for women and special quota for women in public sector jobs particularly in professions more suitable for women.

Constitution of India not only guarantee equal rights for women and prohibit discrimination against them on the basis of sex but also provide for the fuller participation of women in all spheres of national life. According to the constitution, the issue of women development is an integral part of overall development planning. According to Commonwealth of Learning (COL), an inter-governmental organization, has differentiated Open Learning & Distance Learning. Open Learning is an approach which provides learners flexibility and choice i.e. what they learn, when they learn, how they learn where they learn and at what pace. Distance Learning is one form of Open Learning in which the learners and tutors are separated by geographical distance. Students are not present in person at site in distance mode of learning. In Distance Learning, various modes like e-learning, video conferencing, e-mail etc. are used to access education whereas in open learning students are provided with study materials for the courses through study centers. It is very economical way to pursue higher education. There are no affiliated colleges to an open university whereas the distance education can be provided by either an open university or a traditional university. Open learning permits learning with minimum barriers related to age, gender and time constraints. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a term used to describe learning that uses ICT to enhance learning.

It is a system of learning which blends Students support-

- Makes flexibility in learning provisions.

- Removes barriers to access.

- Provides curriculum and instruction design.

- Gives credit to prior learning.

- Provides programme delivery.

- Meets the diverse needs of the students.

Need for higher Education: Male and Female-

Higher education may also be viewed in terms of the needs of its consumers. The term consumer is very wide and heterogeneous. It includes young and old, of both sexes. Theoretically the need of higher education for both males and females are different in their social and cultural needs.

Surely, there are fields, which are suitable to women. For instance, they are more skilled to work on embroidery, kitchen and beauty parlours. But then, such socio- cultural differentials may result in defeating objective of higher education.

The basic argument which is given for women higher education is not that higher education for women is different from that of men. Our main thrust is that in the field of higher education, women should also be the equal partners. Our past experience shows that so far higher education has remained restricted to men only. It should now widen its horizon and include women also.

The importance of higher education for women forms the higher step on the hierarchy on which the lower one very much depends and looks for inspiration and support for inspiration and support for its effectiveness.

Talking in terms of education for women at the lower level, as is being done today, without getting suitable resource potential for the higher level is futile. Viewed in its totality all the schemes of education for women in general depend on their higher education, which lends them effective.

This would lead to healthy, social, economic and political changes that are indispensable for improvement of the position of women in the society. It would enable them to utilize their full potential to play constructive roles in the family and community.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

This limits the scope of social opportunities to women for their personal growth and development. They continue to remain a backward section of society and despite the religious claims for equality they are way behind their male counterparts in enjoying their well- deserved rights.

The present enquiry is an attempt to find out the situation of women's higher education in open distance education system. How the open education system helps in promoting women's education overcoming different barriers in the socio-economic and cultural context of the society.

OBJECTIVES:

- Women's access to higher education as compared to men.
- Women's opinion about the primordial and institutional practices that discourage female higher education.
- The problems that come in the way of female higher education.
- The flexibility in Open Distance education system to promote higher education among women.

HYPOTHESES:

- Women as compared to men have limited chance and access to higher education.

- The benefits of higher education are, by and large reaped by the women of higher classes and the elites of the society and the lower classes remain neglected.

- Institutional and ideological constraints hinder and discourage female higher education.

- Female students prefer highly competitive fields such as medicine, management sciences, computer sciences, law and engineering.

- Higher education enables women to play an effective role in the economic development of the country.

- Recent trend in the growth of women's access to higher education in different fields.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of enquiry will be empirical. Primary data will be generated through the administration of questionnaire and holding of interviews with the respondents and secondary data will be collected from, planning and development department, govt. of west Bengal. The scope of the study will be limited to data collected from the student enrolment status in open university. Strategy of the research adopted will be that of survey. The population of the study consisted of different study centres under this university all over India. The principles of classification will be based on the course wise categorical distribution of student enrolment.

Analysis:

Indira Gandhi National Open University is considered for the promotion of women's education. IGNOU was founded to serve the Indian population by means of distance and open education, providing quality higher education opportunities to all segments of society. It also aims to encourage, coordinate and set standards for distance and open education in India, and to strengthen the human resources of India through education.[4][5] Apart from teaching and research, extension and training form the mainstay of its academic activities. It also acts as a national resource centre, and serves to promote and maintain standards of distance education in India.[5] IGNOU hosts the Secretariats of the SAARC Consortium on Open and Distance Learning (SACODiL) and the Global Mega Universities Network (GMUNET), initially supported by UNESCO.

IGNOU has started a decentralization process by setting up five zones; north, south, east, and west and north-east. The first of the regional headquarters, catering to four southern states, Pondicherry, Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep, is being set up in the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. The Ministry of HRD has entrusted the responsibility of developing Draft Policy on Open and Distance Learning and Online Courses to IGNOU.[6] IGNOU also partners up with other organizations to launch courses. IGNOU offers a BBA in Retail distance learning course in association with Retailers Association of India.

Table-1

**All Over India Students Enrolment Status in Different Fields.**

Programme	Male	Female
M.A.	589448	787063
M.Sc.-Master of Science	240458	306520
M.Com.-Master of Commerce	147494	187731
Pharm.D.-Doctor of Pharmacy	2208	3965
M.F.A. -Master of Fine Arts	2086	2334
M.Phil.-Master of Philosophy	13632	17748
M.Mgt.-Master of Management	4759	2357
M.Ed. -Master of Education	11730	17861
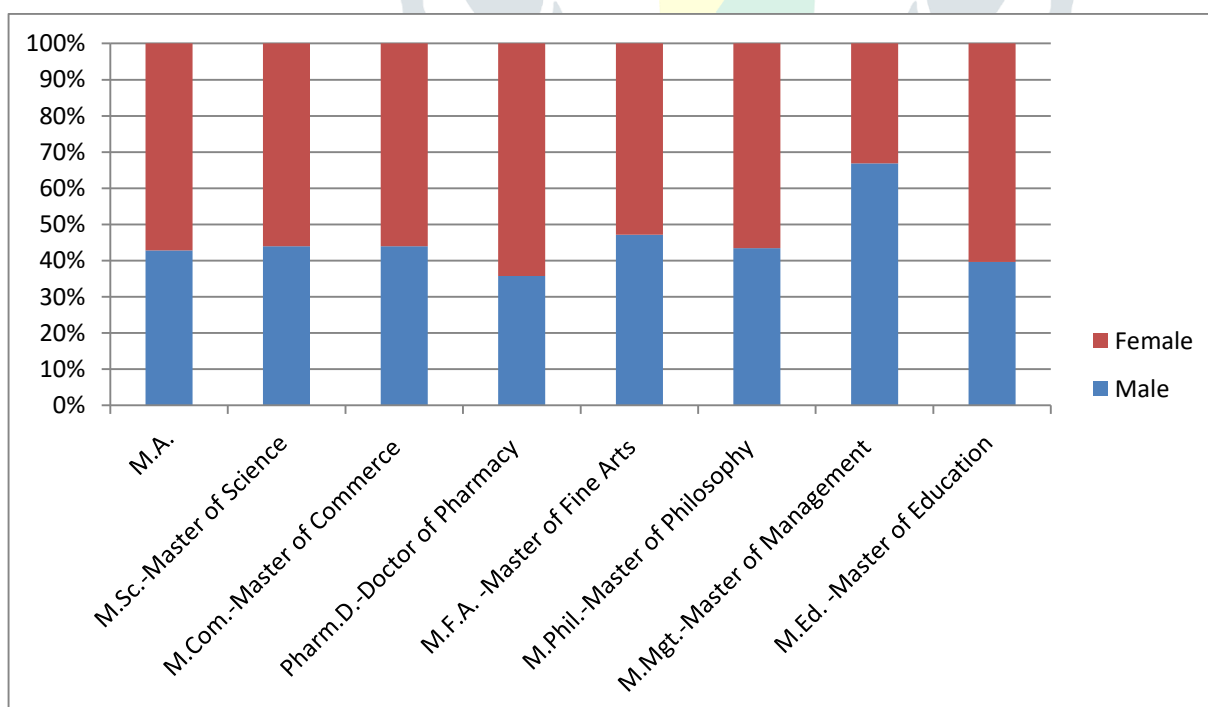
It is clear from the above table that Female students are more frequented with Master of Arts which is clear from the enrolment status. They are not only enrolled in Master of Arts but also they are coming forward in different fields. Though in some fields like Master of Management female students are a little bit lagging behind.

Table-2   **Students Enrolment Status of 2013-14**

LEVEL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Post Graduate	638918	638703	1277621
Under Graduate	1335710	1018988	2354698
PG Diploma	40299	21789	62088
Diploma	81278	48957	130235
Certificate	50009	55380	105389
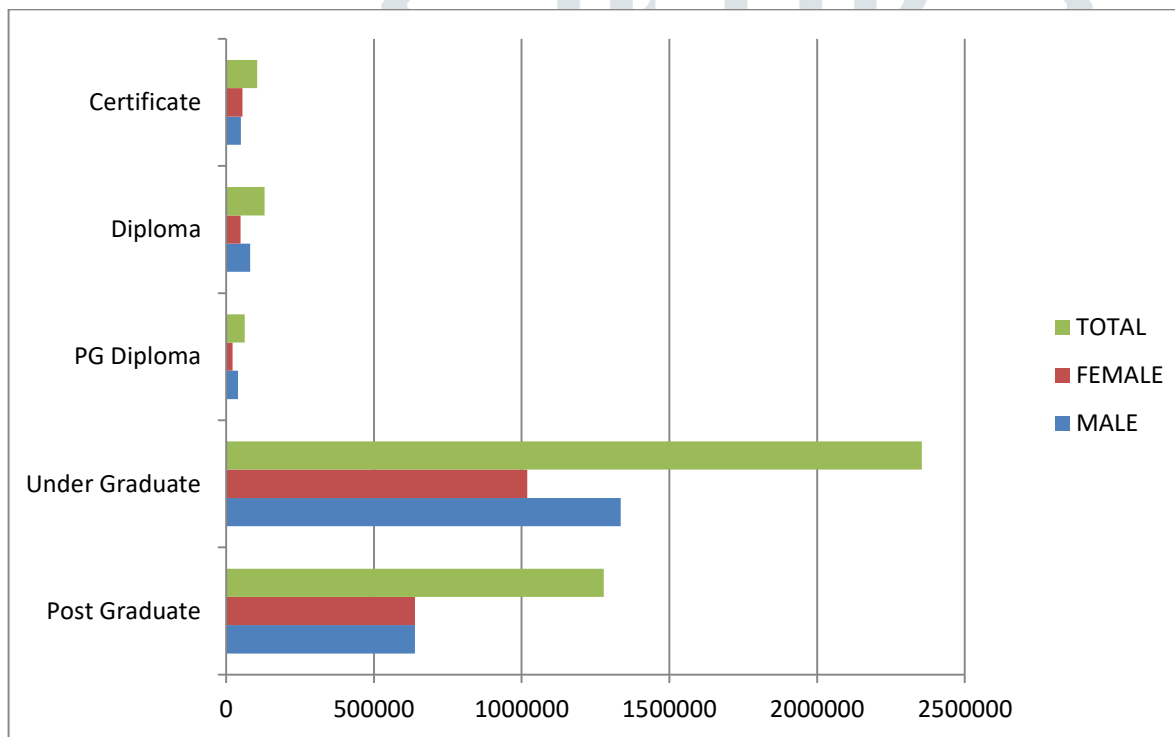
The above table shows that in this session also female enrolment status is lower than Male enrolment in all programmes except only certificate courses. But it has been changed rapidly in the next few years.

Table-3

Students Enrolment Master of Arts, Status of 2018

Gender	Master of arts (Women & gender studies)	Master of arts (Adult Education)	Master of arts (Anthropology)
Male	27	47	287
Female	147	90	254
	Development studies	Master of Arts	Economics
Male	172	133	3183
Female	94	244	3254
	Education	English	Gandhi & Peace studies
Male	616	5482	46
Female	1140	11112	21
	Philosophy	Psychology	Public Administration
Male	623	2238	3348
Female	379	4712	1653
	Development Studies	Hindi	History
Male	27	2853	5949
Female	81	6258	6381

It is clear from the above table how female enrollment has been increased rapidly in the five years. Here female enrollment is higher than male enrollment in all the subjects of Arts group. There is a far difference between male and female enrollment in most of the subjects like English, Psychology, History, Hindi etc.

Discussion and Conclusions

There are a number of findings from this study that warrant further discussion. The review of the literature shows that (a) the women of west Bengal are way behind the women of other developing states.

- ❖ Women's participation in economic development of the country is far less than the women of other developing countries simply because the right of higher education is denied to them.
- ❖ Discrimination against girls is perpetuating the educational gap between boys and girls.

❖ There are some institutional constraints, which come in the way of women's higher education. The institutions of family marriage, caste, and economic systems contain some elements, which do not allow and even discourage female higher education.

❖ The consequences of female illiteracy are far reaching and have a direct impact on women's capacity to sustain and protect themselves and their families. The long term social benefits of women education include increased family income; late marriages and reduced fertility rates; reduced mortality ratio; better nourished and healthier children and families; greater opportunities and life choices; better chances to avoid disease; greater political participation, and improved economic activities. The positive effects of education for girls accrue to the whole society.

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