



# ENHANCEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG WOMEN IN INDIA

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**Abstract :** One of the critical challenges that enhancing higher education in India, i.e., improving gender equality, social and economic development. Despite the notable improvement of female literacy and enrollment rates over recent years, significant gaps due to socio-cultural barriers and limited to quality institutions. The present paper focused on current status of women participation in higher education, the factors that influencing the enrolment and retention and challenges that hinder their academic development. Further, also highlighted the latest Government initiatives, policy interventions and escalation of educational opportunities through digital learning for women. In view of the above, there is a need for multi-dimensional approach which includes awareness of the community, financial support mechanisms, gender sensitive infrastructure and strengthening Government flagship programmes to empower female learners. Therefore, women participation in higher education is mandatory and it helps to improve their personal and professional development but also significant contribution to national development through social transformation.

**Index Terms:** Gender equality, women empowerment, literacy, awareness, enrolment, socio-cultural barriers, economic constraints, safety measures, surveillance, financial support measures, government initiatives, policy interventions, academic development, digital learning, etc.,

## I. INTRODUCTION

“For full development of your women resources the improvement of homes and for moulding the character of the children during the most impressible earth of infancy, the education of women ever greater importance than that of men” **Indian Education Commission (1964-66)**

Women constitute most effective resource of a society and a dynamic source of power. She comprises the very backbone of the family with multiple role-plays of a mother, a wife, a daughter, a pretty sister and a host of others. The status of a nation and its overall socio-economic conditions can very well be assessed by judging and appraising the status of its women. From this point of view, all education activities that have been of central significance to the development of human society. Major emphasis has been laid on promoting equality through educating different classes, races, ethnic groups and castes. It is being argued that equality among human beings could be achieved by providing opportunities for better health and education to girls and women. The sex ratio was 972 per 1000 males in 1901, it has declined 933 in 2011. The overall sex ratio is 943 females per 1000 males right now. The adverse sex ratio for females and its decline was attributed mainly to elevated opportunities among females as compared to males. Lack of education, training and low/no literacy not merely excluded women from social, economic and political power but knowledge power is well. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats (42%) in the local bodies of Panchayaths and Municipalities for women.

Due to adoption of various programmes by union government like, education for all, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), the rate of girl's education been raised from 8.80 percent to 1951 to 65.46 percent in 2011. An answer of special drives in respect of literacy promotion i.e., Community Development Programme (CDP) (1952), Former's Functional Literacy Programme (FFLP), Mass Programme for Functional Literacy (MPFL), Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), Post Literacy Programme (PLP), Continuing Education Programme (CEP), Operation Black Board (OBB), Saaksar Bharat, New India Literacy Programme (NILP) (2015) etc., have been introduced where women's literacy has been given priority. Mere literacy is not enough either higher education has become an urgent necessity. It is an encouraging fact that there is more and more girl's enrollment in higher education. They will now capture a good number of administrative, service-oriented, software and managerial positions. Still, it is not fact that though women were acquired an economic and social identity and she is forced to quit her job in the name of being a responsible mother or sister or wife and so on? Time has become to think that women's education seriously?

Further, enhancing higher education for women in India is essential for nation's progress, gender equality, political development, economic empowerment, and social development. Later, India has made significant steps, but several challenges still raised. Ensuring women's participation in higher education requires a multi-dimensional approach involving policy reforms, institutional support, socio-cultural change, and economic empowerment.

### II. Importance of higher education for women

India's higher education system plays a vital role in shaping the country's future with a vibrant and diverse ecosystems and established a good no. of prestigious institutions on various disciplines new policy reforms for accessing quality education

for increasing the enrolment in higher education institutions. The higher education for women is most crucial for establishing better society.

- **Economic empowerment-** Higher education helps women to access the best suitable jobs, become financially strong and contribute to the nation's economy.
- **Political development-** Education helps women to participate in the political affairs.
- **Gender equality-** Helps the educated women treat their children equally without any discrimination.
- **Social empowerment-** Educated women involved actively in the process of decision-making at both the home and society.
- **Health and well-being-** It helps to have more awareness about health, nutrition, vaccination and child care.
- **National development-** A significant contribution towards as workforce, innovation and turned in to skilled human resources.

## II.NEED OF THE WOMEN EDUCATION

There is a positive co-relation between women literacy rate and life expectancy, while illiteracy is invariably associated with poverty, malnutrition, deprivation high mortality, high population growths and all other aspects under development, women education becomes imperative. Women have required proper education will empowered socially, psychologically, economically and politically, improved health and well-being, stop early marriage and gender discrimination, better outcomes through education for the future generations, develop self-confidence and personal growth and contribute confidently to public life. No girl should be left out of the educational institutions until she reaches the age of twenty. There is a need to continuous engagement of girls in educational institutions through incentives for longer period of a time will certainly help the nation to achieve its goals.

### II.1. Present Scenario of Indian Women

Now-a-days Indian women are well educated, more articulated and more apparent in public life than even before. Hence, they continue to steer cultural, economic and structural barriers. Independent India adopted the constitution and conferred various fundamental rights to all Indians irrespective of age, race, caste, creed, and sex attributes and ensures 'equality before law' in the Article-15 'prohibits any discrimination'. The constitution also promises social and economic justice to women. Keeping in view of the above, the women at present the improved various aspects, such as education, employment, political intervention, changing their social status, health and nutrition concerns, safety and rights, digital inclusion towards expanding vista, etc., with a acceptable progress and foreword with determination.

### II.2. Women Education in the present-day context

Women play multiple roles of earnings, family and caring for children. Because of poverty in India those women often lack education which leads to the problem for it. There is a link between education and development. Education helps to enhance women's income, social respect, family care, etc., but there are still some social causes for which girls are underprivileged of proper education. Even though some girls are admitted to the schools, there is a high dropout rate among girls, especially among rural and disadvantaged groups.

- Female enrolment in higher education institutions in India has been steadily increasing due to reservations and others.
- According to AISHE reports, female GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) has surpassed male.
- Women dominate fields like arts, education, and health sciences but are still underrepresented in STEM, management, and research.

## III.GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN INDIA

After independence, steps have been taken to provide more educational opportunities to women. Several commissions/committees have been constituted to implement the educational progress and timely monitor their progress. Some landmarks on Women Education are the recommendations of national committee on women's education (1955-59), committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls (1961), Committee to look into the causes of lack of public support, particularly in rural areas for girls education and enlist public cooperation (1963), Committee on Status of Women (1971-74), Five Year Plans (First Five Year Plan 1951-56) to Eleventh Five Year Plan period (2007-12), National Policy on Education (1986), Programme of Action (1992), National Commission for Self-employed Women and women in the Informal Sector (1987-88), National Prospective Plan for Women's Education (1988-2000), National Policy for the Employment of Women (2001), National Curriculum Framework of NCERT(2005), Right of Children free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) (2009), Beti Bacho, Beti Padhao (BBBP) (2015), Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (2018), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE), Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, Fee Waivers & Scholarships, Mahila Samakhya Programme, UGC & Higher Education-Based Initiatives and National Education Policy (NEP) (2020). To develop separate courses for the women, more and more skill development courses to be introduced. Innovative programmes, lower cost, offering stipend and involvement of NGOs will certainly add success to the effort.

## IV.HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

India is one of the largest populated countries in the world. Women constitute 48.5 percent of total population (2011 census), but their participation in economic activity is only 34 percent. The first three universities were established in the country in 1857 at Kolkata, Chennai and Mumbai. It was only in 1877 that Calcutta University opened its doors for girls. The efforts made by Indian Education Commission (1882-83) led to a beginning of women participation in higher education. Incentives for women education also came through Government resolution on Education Policy (1913). The first women's college was opened at Lucknow in 1901. The Wilson College was the first to admit women in 1886 in Mumbai. Firstly, S.N.D.T. Women's University (1916), followed by Mumbai, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodai Kanal, Banasthali Vidya Peeth, Banasthali, Rajasthan, Avinashilingam Institute of Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, and Sri Padmavathi Mahila Viswavidyalaya, Tirupati respectively.

For providing education to the women, there are number of colleges came to existence for providing education to them. In this juncture, the state and central governments focused in increased the colleges with a positive transformation while persist in gender gaps in certain areas and remarkable progress. The higher education runs with supportive policies, social awareness

and economic opportunities. India is growing toward a future where equally participate in creation of knowledge, leadership for professional development and progress of a nation.

#### V. PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN IN ACQUIRING HIGHER EDUCATION

The women have been faced many problems in acquiring higher education. They are

- **Social and cultural problems-** Mainly priorities for male child education, gender discrimination, early marriages, safety concerns and mobility limitations. Further, general family expectations that would focus on prioritize the household responsibilities.
- **Economic barriers-** Due to poverty and poor financial support and lack of awareness on scholarships that are available to them, and feel that cost of education is expensive to send them to the schools and colleges. Digital devices and internet access is limited to women in rural areas.
- **Institutional barriers-** Lack of infrastructure facilities such as sanitation, transport, safety and infrastructure at hostels and availability of female faculty members, etc.,
- **Academic and structural problems-** which includes gender gap in STEM education, barriers to research opportunities and career guidance and counseling and skill development and promotion programmes.

#### VI. STEPS FOR ENHANCEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG WOMEN IN INDIA

Education empowers women with required knowledge, skill, self-confidence, necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educated women have higher income goals over their less educated counterparts.

- **Policy initiatives-** under this section, National Education Policy (NEP-2020) extended support for gender inclusion, multidisciplinary learning and flexible pathways. For promoting female education through awareness, Kanya Vidya Dhan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) providing access and infrastructure in higher education institutions. The NEP supports and created gender inclusion fund for female learners particularly, downtrodden disadvantaged sections.
- **Financial provisions-** The government providing scholarships for girls under various schemes such as CBSE, AICTE, Pragati, etc., many universities provide Fee waivers to the single-girl children. In addition to that provides support for women pursuing research, doctoral fellowships and skill promotion programmes, along with sanction of soft loans and interest-free loans for the women community.
- **Infrastructure development in the campus-** As a part of improving the facilities at university campus establish safe and affordable hostels with well-lit campuses and CCTV surveillance and effective grievance redressal cell, sanitary and health and recreation units, clean toilets, menstrual hygienic rooms and started women-friendly transport services with required career counseling centers.
- **Encouraging women in STEM-** Provide specific scholarships and bridge courses and establish partnerships with industries for internships, placements and mentoring along with establishing women technology parks and innovation cells.
- **Opportunities of Lifelong Learning and Digital Learning-** Helps the women who could not attend the regular classes for avail online courses (SWAYAM, NPTEL). Open and Digital Learning (ODL) through IGNOU and state open universities support the rural women through digital literacy programmes.
- **Support systems to be strengthened-** Conducting SPD for recruitment of female faculty and administrators. Conducting counseling, mentoring/mentorship career guidance and gender sensitization programmes, workshops, enforce anti-sexual harassment committee (as per POSH Act), ensure gender related admission policies without any discrimination, etc.,
- **Awareness of family and community-** To change gender-biased attitudes through campaigns and parental counseling in rural areas. In addition to the above, conducting role-model outreach programmes featuring successful women professionals.
- **Improve employability and skill development-** Establish the separate career guidance and counseling cells for women, faculty development and training under schemes for Skill India, NRLM and start-up India.
- **Strengthening policy and institutional support-** Effective implementation of recommended norms of NEP-2020, priorities of women faculty in recruitments, gender budgeting in educational institutions and encourages research grants and fellowships for women scholars.

#### VII. USAGE OF ICT

The ICT is helpful in teaching/ learning, evaluation, monitoring the progress of the students, research and administrations, access to information through digital resources and effective management of student and faculty, multimedia, virtual communication and lifelong learning for professional development. Further, therein

- Personalized learning through AI (Artificial Intelligence).
- Conducting virtual classes for rural/remote learners.
- Usage of mobile apps for accessing the scholarships, reporting grievances, safety, etc.,
- Digital libraries and open educational resources.

#### Outcomes

The higher education leads to:

Women workforce increased through the participation of higher education.

Increased scientific research and innovation.

Reduce the gender-based violence/domestic violence, gender inequality and dependency.

Awareness on improving the health of the family members, children education, nutrition and community development.

Greater participation in decision-making.

Leadership in social and political spheres.

Established strong economy through skilled female professionals.

### VIII.SUGGESTIONS

Participation of women in higher education in India has been improving and considerable progress has been made. The following suggestions may be taken into consideration to raise the access of women to higher education in India.

- Efforts must be made to retain the girls/women in primary and secondary levels and to stop dropout rate at these levels.
- For rejuvenation of women employment efforts should be taken into consideration with attentive planning and execution.
- Innovative approaches and efforts of the Government institutions and non-governmental agencies in enrolment, retention and attaining quality in women's education, women's colleges/universities have to be part of such activities.
- The Educational Institutions will have to organize the orientation/training camps for sharpening the personality and encourage girls and women to participate actively as a leader.
- Reservation of seats to be increased for women in technical disciplines, such as law, police, medicine, engineering, veterinary science, service sector, etc.,
- There is a need to establish more women colleges and universities in different areas of the country.
- Establish welfare hostels and provide all health care facilities for women students need to be improve at all levels.
- Stipends, safety and fellowships must to make available to women at higher education levels and to cover research in different areas.
- The higher education for the women of SC, ST and minorities needs to be empowered. To bring awareness among them regarding the importance of higher education, non-formal and adult education centers, should be opened in all villages.
- Escalate the vocational courses such as nursing, fashion technology, dairy, poultry, knitting, tailoring and dress-designing, food processing units, fair-free shops, driving, hotel management, beautician and computer application should be introduced in colleges to suit the needs of the women.
- To establish and strengthen Centre for women's studies for undertaking relevant research, training, extension, community development, curriculum development, developing research materials, documentation, publication etc.,
- Promote research culture among women through projects and internships.
- To establish strong economy through skilled female professionals.
- Safe campus policies and Corporate CSR scholarships.

### IX.CONCLUSION

In India the role of women in higher education has been significant progress in various aspects, i.e., increased enrolment and retention, gender parity index, overcome the discrimination by sex, socio-economic problems and limited access to specific fields, etc., there is a need to put continuous efforts for accessing equal opportunities for education to equip them with acceptable leadership for development, inclusive environment for empowerment, strategies for sustainable development and to national progress. Enhancement of higher education among women in India is not just a developmental need but a social responsibility. Further, required collaboration between government institutions, NGOs, families, media and society is essential to ensure that every woman in India can pursue and shine in higher education.

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