



## A STUDY ON EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S POSITION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Educating a woman educates a household, but educating a man educates an individual," is a quote from Ghanaian scholar Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey, relayed to me by Mr. Ramaswamy, President of the Monterey Institute, during my recent interview with him on gender and access issues of education in India. This estimate tells us that the influence of an educated mother is profound and immense. Whether they are a mother, a nanny, a loving grandma, or an elder sister, women are ultimately responsible for providing the majority of care for new born in most countries. A newborn is mostly surrounded by women from the moment of birth until early childhood, and their expectations, words, and body language have a significant impact on the child's future. It should come as no surprise that George Washington, the country's first president, spoke highly of his mother. "All I am I owe to my mother attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her". Indeed, when women are educated and empowered, the benefits are enormous. Studies have shown that women's literacy leads to increased life expectancy, reduced child mortality, and ultimately healthier and educated children. In spite of the abundance of good things women literacy can bring to a society, such benefits have not been recognized in many developing countries, such as India. As per the 2011 Census, the total literacy rate in India stands at 74.00 per cent and the rate of literacy among women is 65.46 per cent. The percentage of female literacy in the country was 54.16 per cent in 2001. The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 74.00 per cent as per 2011 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86 per cent in 1951 to 65.46 per cent in 2011. Female literacy rate during the period 1991-2001 increased by 14.87 per cent whereas male literacy rate rose by 11.72 per cent. The increase in female literacy rate was 3.15 per cent more compared to male literacy rate.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education offers a wide range of advantages to both individuals and societies by imparting skills and competencies that are essential to human development and an improved quality of life. Particularly when it comes to women and girls, investing in their education yields remarkably large social and economic rewards. Well-

educated women make greater investments in their offspring and make positive contributions to the future of society. They are more likely to work, which gives them the opportunity to make a living, become aware of and assert their legal rights, and gain more clout in the home and in public life. Education is essential for empowering women and for closing the gap between women and men in respect of socio-economic opportunities it can reduce inequalities based on gender and alter the historical legacy of disadvantage faced by women. Education has long been recognized as a fundamental right with far-reaching consequences for human development and societal progress. The right to education is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various international covenants.

Education is one of the most significant means for empowering an individual or community in general, and women and girls in particular. Level of educational attainment and literacy rate are indicators of general development of any society. Gender equality and empowerment of women are indispensable for achieving prosperity and sustainable development. Since Independence, India has adopted many different paths and strategies for national, social, economic and political development. The overall situation and status of women also has improved.

### **EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

As per the 2011 Census, the total literacy rate in India stands at 74.00 per cent and the rate of literacy among women is 65.46 per cent. The percentage of female literacy in the country was 54.16 per cent in 2001. The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 74.00 per cent as per 2011 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86 per cent in 1951 to 65.46 per cent in 2011. Female literacy rate during the period 1991-2001 increased by 14.87 per cent whereas male literacy rate rose by 11.72 per cent. The increase in female literacy rate was 3.15 per cent more compared to male literacy rate.

Education is one of the indispensable constituents offering to the human resource development of the country. In the knowledge economy, qualified human resources improve economic prosperity, social well-being and political resistance of the country. According to Prof. Meier "Persons who have skills, education and experience are critical for the economic and political development of the country". Thus, education is an exclusive channel that can bring exhilarating change in society. Education enhances analytical reasoning capacity, communication abilities and productivity of an individual. It bolsters self-confidence, broad-mindedness, and proficiency in an individual. Education magnifies an individual's temperament and educated individuals create powerful nations. Martin Luther King has justly said that "the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to act critically. Intelligence plus character that is the good of true education. However, in the dynamic world quality

primary and secondary education is insufficient to sustain the increasing competition. Accordingly, higher education is essential for developing countries like India as it intensifies human resource development. Higher Education aims at transforming human minds by providing percipience and knowledge. Higher education imparts human values and life skills which are crucial for peaceful living. The National Policy on Education (1986) "Higher education provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical, social, economic, cultural, moral, and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through the dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills. Being at the apex of the educational pyramid, it also has a key role in producing teachers for the education system.

Women's empowerment can be defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected both in external qualities (viz. health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making, and also at the level of material security) and internal qualities (viz. self-awareness and self-confidence) [Human Development in South Asia.

In the conventional male-dominated Indian society women were treated as subordinate and inferior to men. They were subjugated to discrimination, injustice in all the phases of life, education was not exceptional to this. After independence, the status of women has experienced positive changes in India. According to the Census of India (2011), the gender gap in literacy which was 26.6 percent in 1981 has declined to 16.6 percent in 2011, with 65.5 percent of the female literacy rate. Women's Education is important to achieve social justice and accelerate social transformation. Approximately 48.0 percent of the Indian population constitute women. They contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. Unless women are empowered country cannot flourish. Higher education helps women to be independent, efficient and empowered. It provides better career opportunities, enhances self-dignity, enlarges participation in political activities, increases the standard of living and promotes family welfare. Thus, higher education is fundamental for woman's personal development and also for the development of the whole country.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the expansion of institutions of higher learning.
- To look into the differences in gender in higher education.
- To examine how women's status has changed in India's higher education system.

## METHODOLOGY

The majority of the research study makes use of secondary data and a qualitative technique. The Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Indian government issued a number of annual reports that were available to the public. It also originated from a few journals and articles, as well as publications like the Economic Survey, Educational Statistics at a Glance, UGC Annual Reports, AISHE Report, and Indian Public Finance Statistics. This research article only addresses the enrolment of female students in higher education and the growth of higher education in India.

## IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EDUCATION

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stated that “If you educate a man, you educate an individual and, if you educate women you educate a whole family.” Women empowered means mother India empowered. Women play a predominant role in the social, cultural, economic, religious, and political life of a country. The Importance of women's education is briefly summarized below:

- ❖ Only education will enable women to come forward and contribute towards the development and prosperity of the country.
- ❖ Economic empowerment and freedom will come only through proper education and employment of women.
- ❖ Education helps women lead a better life.
- ❖ Educated girls and women are conscious about the importance of health and hygiene. They are led to a healthy and happy lifestyle.
- ❖ Educated mothers can take better care of both themselves and their baby.
- ❖ Educated women are now looked upon with dignity and respect.
- ❖ Educated women are more aware of their rights for justice. This will eventually lead to reduction in instances of violence and injustice against women such as dowry, forced prostitution, child marriage, and female foeticide.
- ❖ Women's education is a prerequisite to alleviate poverty.

## GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR IMPROVEMENT IN GIRLS EDUCATION

The expansion of education among girls/women has been an integral part of educational policies and programmes. Ministry of Human Resource Development has taken a number of initiatives for expansion of girls' school and higher education, details of which are as under.

## SCHOOL EDUCATION

### **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya**

This scheme was launched in July, 2004, to provide education to girls at primary level. It is primarily for the underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level for girls is very low. The schools that were set up have 100 per cent reservation 75 per cent for backward class and 25 per cent for BPL (below Poverty line) girls.

### **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**

This is newly announced Scheme of the Govt. of India for enhancing girls' education in India.

### **UDAAN Giving wings to Girl Students**

The Scheme is dedicated to the development of girl child education, so as to promote the admission of girl students. The aim is to address the teaching gap between school education and engineering entrance examinations. It seeks to enhance the enrolment of girl students in prestigious technical education institutions through incentives & academic support.

### **MahilaSamakhya- MahilaSamakhya (MS)**

MahilaSamakhya- MahilaSamakhya is an on-going scheme for women's empowerment that was initiated in 1989 to translate the goals of the National Policy on Education into a concrete programme for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly those from socially and economically marginalized groups.

### **Saakshar Bharat**

The National Literacy Mission was recast with its new variant, Saakshar Bharat launched in 2009. It aims to accelerate adult education, especially for women's (in the age group of 15 years and above) who have no access to formal education, targeted female literacy as a critical instrument for women's empowerment.

### **Mid-Day Meal Scheme**

The gender gap in school participation tends to narrow, as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme helps erode the barriers that prevent girls from going to school. Mid-Day Meal Scheme also provides a useful source of employment for women and helps liberate working women from the burden of cooking at home during the day. In these and other ways, women and girl children have a special stake in Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

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

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) has launched a number of schemes to encourage the enrolment and promotion of girls in Higher Education. Day Care Centres in Universities and Colleges.
- Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child for Pursuing Higher and Technical Education.
- Construction of Women's Hostels for Colleges.
- Development of Women's Studies in Universities and Colleges.
- Scheme of Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education Post-Doctoral Fellowships for Women.

## PROFILING GENDER GAP IN EDUCATION

Gender gap has been well documented and analysed by governmental agencies, international organisation, university departments, NGO'S and individual researchers. Some recent publications that provide a panoramic view of this subject include, World Bank (1997), which charts the terrain occupied by primary organisations Ramchandaran (1998), which provides the comparative perspective on girls and Women's education in South Asia Shukla and Kaul (1998), Bhattacharya (1998), which looks more generally at the status of education in India and finally Haq and Haq (1998), which analyses education within the context of human development in South Asia.

The past five decades have produced mass of information on innovative practices and experimental programmes. There are several policies and standards that address the reasons behind the gender disparity in education and offer suggestions for closing it. Frequently cited obstacles to female education include negative cultural and societal attitudes, gender roles that are different from those of boys and girls, competing demands on girls' time, and economic factors like lack of resources, distance from school, lack of facilities in schools for girls, lack of female teachers, lack of security inside and outside the school, curriculum that is not relevant and flexible, gender stereotyping in curriculum, gender unfriendly classroom environment, early marriage and childbearing, lack of female role models, and fear of the social structure collapsing. The most often suggested strategies for overcoming these obstacles are, in response, developing flexible school calendars, encouraging community participation, raising parental awareness, producing gender-neutral textbooks, training teachers for promoting gender equality, encouraging girls' access to science and maths education, relying on multiple delivery systems, and increasing primary education resources. Actually, there is some consensus regarding the limitations of education and over what constitutes "effective" tactics. But these issues still exist in spite of this convergence.

The conversation on methods must be situated within a dynamic framework. In order to assess this shifting situation, determine its implications, and create plans to adapt to it, revision and reflection are needed.

The 93rd Constitution Amendment with the insertion of new article (21A). The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 and 14 years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine enables any citizen to seek the enforcement of the right by way of resort to writ Jurisdiction under Article 32 and 226 of the Constitution. Thus the 93rd Constitution Amendment fulfils the mandate of the CRC (The convention on the rights of the child which was adopted by UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989). This initiative of the government has had far reaching consequences and has been a major catalyst in increasing the number of enrolments in primary classes.

### **RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENTIAL**

Over the past 60 years, experience has demonstrated that prioritising education in policy declarations has, in part, guaranteed the availability of sufficient resources, but it does not guarantee that underprivileged groups would profit from federal initiatives. The educational system's growth has been inconsistent and insufficient. Boys and girls have different educational statuses, with the disadvantageous castes and tribes having a greater disparity. The literacy rate among wage workers is lower than that of other occupational groups. A distinct rural-urban divergence is also seen. It is reasonable to assume that rural women from scheduled castes or tribes will have the lowest educational attainment. India represents a picture of contrasts when it comes to education and employment opportunities for girls in the rural and the urban areas. Cultural, social and economic factors still prevent girls from getting education opportunities and so the question of equality is still amirage. The status of the girl child has been a subject of much discussion, controversy and debate. While more and more families are beginning to value girls as equals to boys, there are still overwhelming cultural and economic reasons why female children are not receiving the same medical, emotional and educational attention as their male counterparts. From the start, girl child is seen as burden rather than a blessing, bearer of exorbitant dowry, who will eventually move into the home of her husband. As a child a girl receives less food, attention and emotional support than her male counterpart as an adult, less attention is paid on developing her potential and more on matrimony and motherhood as these are regarded the essential and overarching goals of her life and all education is a preparation for that. In the rural areas, the girl child is made to perform household and agricultural chores.

Among the several things impeding girls' education is this. Among their main responsibilities include cleaning the house, cooking, tending to their siblings, the sick and elderly, grazing the cattle, and gathering firewood. As a result, households are hesitant to set funds aside for education. Other factors impeding girls'

education include their physical safety, particularly when they have to travel considerable distances to school, and their dread of sexual harassment. However, there is a noticeable gap in the educational and career options available to girls in metropolitan areas. There is an element of awareness of gender issues in the more educated sections of society in certain regions. Moreover, urban spaces permit greater opportunity for personal autonomy to girls. Though the figures for girls would still be low as compared to boys, what is heartening to see is that whenever given the opportunity, girls have excelled more than boys. For instance, in the Central Board of Secondary Examinations for grades 10 and 12, which are at an All India level, girls have for over a decade now, bagged all the top positions and secured a higher overall percentage compared to boys. In employment opportunities too, women in India today have stormed all male bastions. Be it piloting aircraft, heading multi-national corporations, holding top bureaucratic positions, leading industrial houses, making a mark as doctors, filmmakers, chefs, engineers and even as train and lorry drivers, women have made it to all hitherto considered male bastions in India. However, this is not reason enough for us to cheer. For the number of girls and women who have been left out of education and employment opportunities still far outweighs those who have got them. It is important to realize that fewer girls survive in the system long enough to reach the end of secondary education. And what are needed to change this scenario are not just governmental efforts but a change in societal norms, in cultural and traditional biases and in general mind-set of people. And in this the media, the civil society, and the youth, the women and girls have a lot to contribute.

The Ministry of Education has released the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022 which said that female enrolment in Higher Education increased to 2.07 crore in 2021-22 from 1.57 crore in 2014-15 (an increase of 50 lakh students, 32 per cent increase). As per the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) released on Thursday, the enrolment of SC students is 66.23 lakh in 2021-22 as compared to 46.07 lakh in 2014-15 (an increase of 44 per cent). The survey also showed that the total enrolment in higher education has increased to nearly 4.33 crore in 2021-22 from 4.14 crore in 2020-21. There has been an increase of around 91 lakh in the enrolment from 3.42 crore (26.5 per cent) in 2014-15. "The enrolment of SC Female students has increased to 31.71 lakh in 2021-22 from 29.01 lakh in 2020-21 and 21.02 lakh in 2014-15. There has been an increase of 51 per cent since 2014-15. The enrolment of ST students has increased to 27.1 lakh in 2021-22 from 16.41 lakh in 2014-15 (an increase of 65.2 per cent). The enrolment of OBC students has also increased to 1.63 crore in 2021-22 from 1.13 crore in 2014-15.

There is a notable increase in OBC student enrolment since 2014-15 of around 50.8 lakh," the Ministry said quoting the survey. As per the Survey, the Minority Student enrolment has increased to 30.1 lakh in 2021-22 from 21.8 lakhs in 2014-15 (an increase of 38 per cent). Female Minority Student enrolment has increased to 15.2



lakh in 2021-22 from 10.7 lakh in 2014-15. Notably, the total Student Enrolment in North East States is 12.02 lakh in 2021-22 as compared to 9.36 lakh in 2014-15. The female enrolment in North East States is 6.07 lakh in 2021-22, higher than the male enrolment of 5.95 lakh.

"As per response in AISHE 2021-22, about 78.9 per cent of the total students are enrolled in undergraduate level courses and 12.1 per cent are enrolled in postgraduate level courses. Among Disciplines at the undergraduate level in AISHE 2021-22, enrolment is highest in Arts (34.2 per cent), followed by science (14.8), Commerce (13.3) and Engineering and Technology (11.8). Among streams at postgraduate level in AISHE 2021-22, maximum students are enrolled in Social Science (21.1 per cent) followed by science (14.7)," the survey stated. Government Universities constituting 58.6 per cent of total Universities, contribute 73.7 per cent of total enrolment, and Private Universities account for 26.3 per cent of total enrolment. The total number of Universities / University level institutions registered is 1,168, Colleges 45,473 and Standalone Institutions 12,002. In all, 341 Universities/University level institutions have been established since 2014-15. 17 Universities (of which 14 are State Public Universities) and 4,470 Colleges are exclusively for women, the survey said. As per the survey, the total number of faculty teachers in 2021-22 is 15.98 lakh, of which about 56.6 per cent are male and 43.4 are female. Female faculty/teachers have increased to 6.94 lakh in 2021-22 from 5.69 lakh in 2014-15 (an increase of 22 per cent since 2014-15). There is a marginal betterment of female per 100 male faculties from 75 in 2020-21 to 77 in 2021-22, it added. The Ministry of Education, Government of India releases the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022. The Ministry has been conducting AISHE since 2011, covering all Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in the country registered with AISHE collecting detailed information on different parameters such as student enrolment, teachers and infrastructural information.

## CONCLUSION

Empowerment of girls and women is essential for achieving sustainable development. The new strategies and initiatives must include various tools of social empowerment of women such as right and access to education, health care, adequate nutrition, right to property and access to equal opportunities, legal and institutional mechanism to help women in need, access to media and finally dispute redressed mechanism. Socio-cultural practices that work as barriers to empowerment of women and girls need to be removed at the earliest. The survey also showed that the total enrolment in higher education has increased to nearly 4.33 crore in 2021-22 from 4.14 crore in 2020-21. There has been an increase of around 91 lakh in the enrolment from 3.42 crore (26.5 per cent) in 2014-15. "The enrolment of SC Female students has increased to 31.71 lakh in 2021-22 from 29.01 lakh in 2020-

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