

Women and Higher education in India

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"If you educate the man, you educate the person but if you educate the woman, you educate the nation".

-- Mahatma Gandhi

Abstract: One of the most significant transformations in education in India over the past several decades is the drastic increase in women's access to colleges and universities. In contrast, the presence of a critical mass of women in the decision-making process remains vastly inadequate. Higher education is recognized as a powerful instrument of socioeconomic advancement of the society in general and a vehicle for upward social mobility for deprived and marginalized sections in particular. The very first commission for education, University Education Commission Set up by the Government of free India in 1948 placed immense importance on the education of women. Now, India has third largest higher education system of the World. The present scenario witnesses that the number of women in India in higher education is increasing slowly. The necessity, the factors responsible for women participation in higher education and the suggestions for promoting women participation in Higher education are discussed in this paper.

Key words: Gender Equity, Higher education, Women, Education Commission, Women Education, Social Transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has been regarded both as an end in itself and as means of realizing other desirable ends. It develops the personality and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improve their socio-economic status. It has been recognized as a major instrument which societies can use to direct the process of change and development towards desired goals.

The movement for improving women's status all over the world has always emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in the society. The aim was to use education to make women more capable of fulfilling their traditional roles as wives and mothers and not to make them more efficient and active units in the process of socio-economic or political development.

2. HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

The landmark in the history of women's higher education in India was the establishment of an Indian Women's University in 1916 in Bombay, which is known as SNDT Women's University. The objectives for the establishment of this University were:

1. To make provision for the higher education of women through modern Indian Language (mother tongue as media of instruction).
2. To regulate pre-university education to start, aid, maintain and affiliate institutions for such education and to formulate courses of studies specially suited to the needs and requirements of women.
3. To make provisions for the training of teachers for primary and secondary schools.
4. To institute and confer, such degrees and diplomas, titles, certificates and marks of honours in respect of degrees and examinations as may be prescribed by the regulation.

Some other objectives were also added from time to time.

After that, in the year 1921, women's social status had begun to show an upward trend. Girls were encouraged to take advantage of whatever chances for education were available.

During the year 1937, Higher Education of women developed immensely. Several Educational Commissions and Committees were appointed in different States. Then came post-independence period, Dr. Radhakrishnan was appointed by the Government of India as Chairman to report on Indian University Education and suggested improvements that will be suited to the future requirements of the country. The Commission has recommended some special course for girls in order to enable them to fit themselves well in their social setup. The courses are:

- a). Home Economics i.e., Home Science
- b). Nursing
- c). Teaching
- d). Fine Arts

3. GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

Objectives are the most important in an educational system to give direction to it. The objectives in the curriculum should provide ample opportunities both for the gifted as well as the ordinary students and should be a means for an all-round development of personality. And the objectives must always be integrally related to the student's home, social environments, the life and the work after the education. The Education Commission observed, "In modern world the role of women goes much beyond home and bringing up the children. They are now adopting a career of their own and sharing equally with men, the responsibility for the development of society in all its aspects." After considering all necessary points they developed the general objectives of girl's higher education, as:

1. To create right attitude towards life-individual and social.
2. To impart useful knowledge for various aspects of life.
3. To give practical training for life.
4. To develop good personal habits.
5. To inculcate a sense of social awareness and a spirit of service to society.
6. To make career for future.

As needs and circumstances changed there was a periodical review of all the courses. Therefore, to fulfill the objectives, it is for the society to provide greater opportunities for the education girls to be of social use by utilizing their knowledge for social and national development. The National Committee on Women's Education recommended:

1. Development of more employment opportunities particularly of a part time nature.
2. Improvement in employment information and guidance services for women entering higher education.
3. Development of Open University systems should be expanded extending the facility to all the girls in the rural and backward areas.
4. Correspondence courses and self-study programs can be especially useful for girls desirous of continuing education but are unable to do so because of circumstance.

4. PROGRESS OF WOMEN HIGHER EDUCATION

The National Policy of Education recommended the following points:

- a. More colleges and Universities should be opened for Higher Education.
- b. Incentive like scholarships, free ship etc. should be provided to enable girls from rural areas to pursue higher education for girls belonging to weaker sections. In addition to free ship and scholarships, bursaries also be provided to meet their requirements for food and lodging.
- c. Girls should be encouraged to enter professional courses.
- d. The women wings of the universities could undertake large scale extension programmes in order to active girls and women in the surrounding areas to take advantage of educational and occupational facilities of various types.
- e. In order to increase the representation of rural women in higher education, 30 per cent seats, may be reserved for girls.
- f. All agencies involved with preparation of curriculum, prescription of textbooks and organization of educational processes will have to evince awareness towards women's groups etc. should be involved in giving a new perspective to the various issues of content and process of education. As a result of implementation of Recommendations of the National Policy on Education and implementation of special programmes for women's education in various five years plan, the higher for girls in India expanded very rapidly.

5. MAJOR PROBLEMS IN WOMEN HIGHER EDUCATION:

The higher education of girls at present suffers from several weaknesses in institutions, failures to maintain academic calendars, outdated curriculum, disparities in the quality of education and lack of adequate support for research. The proliferation of colleges and universities by the State Government without prior consultation of the UGC is the main problem in the maintenance of standards in higher education for women. The Commission is in no position to control this situation. The only instrument available with Commission is non-sanctioning of grants to such colleges and universities.

6. REASONS FOR DROPOUT OF WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

Through there is much in common between the education of boys and girls there is some difference between the way in which the girls' problems and boy's problems have to be tackled. This arises out of the peculiar social and economic conditions prevailing in the country and the existence of an age-long tradition as a result of which although in theory there is equality of educational opportunities between boys and girls, there is in practice no such opportunity. There are many reasons for dropout of girls in higher education. The reasons can be categorized as follows:

1. Economic
2. Familial
3. Educational and
4. Social

6.1. ECONOMIC REASONS:

Poverty is the predominant factor that hinders girls to get higher education. Parents of lower and middle classes think, it is wise to save money for their dowry rather than for their education. Parents of middle and lower classes think, it is wise to save money for their dowry rather than for their education. Whenever the purse of parents gets tight, they at first step strive to stop the expenditure on education of their daughters. Most of them consider it an unnecessary expense as the girl has to go to some other family. The higher education is also so expensive that parents of middle class cannot afford it. In every third family we find girls who are not able to get education due to financial difficulty of the parents.

6.2. FAMILIAL REASONS:

There are narrow-minded parents who think that education spoils the character of their daughters if their loving daughter goes to college she will not enter the kitchen; in other words she will not be able to prove herself to be a modest daughter-in-laws. In college she will only learn fashion, in co-education she may spoil her character. They argued that when their daughter need not earn, then what is the need of higher education. Instead they will get her married.

6.3. EDUCATIONAL REASONS:

The dearth of good college or university or not getting admission is also serious problems faced by girls for higher education. Absence of proper hostel is also a problem for those who want to go to other places for education. The educational reasons which stand in the way of girl's education are inadequacy of facilities, particularly distance of college or university, irrelevance of the content of education, curriculum not suited to their requirement etc.

6.4. SOCIAL REASONS:

It was felt that higher education for girls resulted in increasing the number of spinsters. So must of the parents wanted their daughters to discontinue highest education. They think it will be late marriage for her daughter if she continues highest education. Thus, the problems of losing girls higher education marriage are very common. According to a survey, 75 per cent of girls lost their education due to marriage. They give up their studies to enter home life.

7. FREE HIGHER EDUCATION FOR GIRLS:

Higher education is an important phase in the process of educating a country. Several provisions have been made thereby increasing the rate of enrolment and educational status of women at various levels.

The free education policy was introduced in schools in 1979 and was extended to colleges in 1986 with the following view:

- Educating women is the first step towards the attainment of the goal of literacy, equality and development.
- Education heightens awareness amongst women regarding their social and economic rights and lowers the chances of their oppression and exploitation.
- Education helps women to recognize their own identity and their right to be the dignity of society.
- Higher education opens grounds for various specialized professional fields.
- Free education may act as a facilitator particularly to women belonging to lower socio-economic status for higher education.
- Free higher education seems to have helped to increase the enrolment of girls at higher educational level and also to bring desired gender equality. For example in the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, the proportion of women was 42 per cent in 1990-91, against 33 per cent a decade before.

In the absence of this policy, it is feared, the enrolment of girl students would not have risen this fast. The reason being that the parents discriminate between their male and female offspring in the matter of financing their education. They incur relatively less in the range of one-fourth expenditure for items such as books, stationery etc., meant for their daughter's education. It was perceived that the policy of tuition free higher education for girls in Gujarat has not only turned out to be an effective antidote to the observed societal discrimination, but also reflected that educated mothers are better and efficient household producers. Thus, the attainment of the objective of "efficiency in household production" may be more of a social than a personal gain, which lends further to the promotion of free higher education for girls.

8. NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE PLAN FOR GIRLS' HIGHER EDUCATION

For the acceleration of girls education the Kothari Commission, remarked:

"As at present students should have free access to courses in arts, humanities, sciences and technology. It would be wrong to restrict their choice or to compel them to take particular courses. The more academic type of girls with ambitions of pursuing careers of research or teaching at the colleges or universities level or in professions such as medicine, or technology should have all the opportunities and incentives for doing so".

The Commission felt that there is a special need to link up higher education with specific avenues of employment for girls. Girls should also be given opportunities of research work under schemes of ICMR, ICAR etc. The Commission also recommended universities should set up research units to deal with girl's education. These should take up follow-up studies to educate girls, consider girl's higher education from the point of view of employment opportunities available for girls.

The IGNOU widened the access to higher education by providing opportunities to learners from disadvantaged groups like women, people living in backward regions and hilly areas.

9. CONCLUSION:

Higher education as major catalyst of social change is badly lacking for the majority, more so for the lower socio-economic status and rural women in comparison with their counter parts. However, the rate of girls' enrolment in higher education has been increased from the last two to three decades. Besides this, several provisions have been made thereby to increase the number of girls in higher education.

Programme of scholarships and financial assistance to girls students in colleges and universities on liberal scale and programme of the provision of suitable but economic hostel accommodations for girls students with all the necessary amenities on a large scale, to encourage girls from rural areas to take advantage of higher education. Regarding the course, Home Science, Fine Arts, Nursing and Teaching are the main courses provided for them. There are many problems and constraints for girls in higher education.

Girl's enrolment and retention in education can be accelerated by taking different measures like providing suitable infrastructure as lack of availability of higher education institutions nearby leads to dropout as there is little security for girls because of increase of incidence of eve teasing.

Parental perception is also not very positive as majority of the parents have negative perception of higher education. They have a feeling that higher education spoils the girls. They have a fear and strong suspicion of pre-marital sex and bad company in the college and universities. Another wrong conception in the society is that the daughter is the property of someone else. So why invest on her by sending her to college? It is to high time to break this myth. Merely free ship and reservation are too meek a solution for this complicated problem of women education. It can only be solved by bringing educational awareness and attitudinal changes.

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