



GENDER ISSUES IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE OF NORTH EAST INDIA

Dr. Anjali Devi

Assistant Professor of Economics, Barama College, Baksa, Assam, India

ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS:
higher education, gender
gap, enrolment, women
education

Despite the huge number of higher educational institutions in India, it is surprising that women record a lower presence across most institutions of higher education as compared to men. Significant male –female disparities exist in the enrolment of women in higher education. According to the Annual Status of Higher Education in States and Union Territories 2013 the GER in higher education has reached 19.4% in 2012-13. There exists a wide variation between male and female GERs in the country. The share of females enrolled in higher education is only 12.7%, while it is 17.1% for males. The gap between male and female GER is more pronounced in urban areas than in the rural areas. There are certain barriers of women access to higher education which needs to overcome for establishment of a gender equal society and the overall development of our country. In this paper a picture of women access to higher education has been presented by the author and also suggested some measures to overcome the barriers.

INTRODUCTION

The importance women's education is perpetually being emphasised in full measures by the government and special provisions are being made to educate them and also to improve their socio-economic status. Although importance of women and girls education is greatly felt in the recent time but the gender gap at all levels of education in India still a burning issue for which various efforts have been taken up the governments. Gender disparity has been a major issue in India's pursuit for achieving the goals of universal elementary education. In order to overcome the problems faced by girls several measures have been initiated across the country. In spite of various programmes gender gap in education is a burning issue all over India. While female enrolment has increased rapidly since the 1990's, there is still a substantial gap in education. Increased female enrolment is however, compromised by persistently high rates of drop out and poor attendance of girls relative to boys. Girls also constitute a large proportion of out of school children. India accounts for 30% of the world's total illiterate population and around 70% of these illiterates are women. Women education lags far behind the education of men leading to negative repercussions on the country's overall development. In many parts, girls and women have little access to schooling and lower completion rates than to boys and men. Educationally women constitute one of the deprived and long neglected groups of the society. The deprivation gets acute with their poverty and socio-economic backwardness. Higher the education

among women more decent is their lifestyle. Despite intensive efforts of the governments during the last six decades to improve the literacy levels, total literacy rate in different categories reveals that the rural-urban and inter- group disparities in literacy and education are sharp. The rural – urban divide is the sharpest among females themselves. Urban females are twice as well-off in literacy. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled tribe females are at the bottom of the heap. There has not been much improvement in this regard during 1991 and 2011 as is evident with literacy rates for male and female.

GROWTH OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the last six decades since independence in India the higher education system has undergone rapid development and it has been transformed from an elite system to an egalitarian one. In 1947, there were only 18 universities and their number has increased to 184 in 1990-91 and again tremendously increased to 635 in 2010-11. Similarly the number of colleges also has been increased from 500 in 1947 to about 33,023 during the year 2010-11. At present India has 785 Universities or University level Institutions, 38056 number of Colleges of which 46 Central Universities, 347 State Universities, 125 Deemed Universities, 69 Institutions of National Importance, 14 Open Universities and 267 private Universities. The enrolment of students in 1950-51 was only 0.2 million which has been considerably increased to 16.97 million during 2010-11. At present the total enrolment in higher education is estimated to be 33 million of which 17.9 million

boys and 15.4 million girls. With this huge expansion, Indian higher education system is considered to be the third largest higher education system in the world next to China and USA.

However in spite of rapid growth of higher education in India, the Indian higher education system is facing a lot of challenges. Equity and inclusion have been the major challenges in front of Indian higher education. To meet these challenges, the University Grants Commission (UGC) called for a major thrust for expansion of higher education and promotion of greater regional and social equity in the 11th Five Year Plan. During this Plan, provision was made for setting up of 16 new Central Universities and 374 Model Colleges in low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) districts. Access, equity and inclusion were the major thrust areas in higher education during the 11th Plan period. During the 12th FYP emphasis was given to increase the access to higher education among all sections of the society, accordingly Rastriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan was also launched with the target of achieving 32 percent GER in higher education by 2022. Access to higher education is still less than the minimum international threshold levels, distribution of institutions is skewed, enrolment in public universities is largely concentrated in the conventional disciplines whereas in the private self-financed institutions, the student enrolment is overwhelmingly in the market-driven disciplines. There are still considerable regional disparities, gender disparities, social disparities in the access to higher education India. Women access to higher education in India still remains considerably low in compare to men.

PLACE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Since independence there had been a phenomenal growth in the number of women students enrolment in higher education. On the eve of the independence the women enrolment was less than 10 per cent of the total enrolment but in the academic year 2010-11 women enrolment increased up to 41.5 per cent. The reason behind this neglecting attitude was biological differences. But today, in the 21st century none can ignore the necessity and urgency of higher education for women. Because now-a-days there is no biological differences. That is why all over the world higher education for women has gained a wider role and responsibility. In the third world countries the need for higher education among women is more important as because colonialism has remained a great force here which hinders education for the general masses and for women in particular.

WOMEN ENROLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Our past experience shows that higher education was restricted only to men. Women did not have any entry in the domain of higher education. Now a day this facility has been widen and women have equal opportunities in higher education. The commission on the higher education for women, University of Madras in 1979 rightly observed: for women and men college education is necessary for character formation, ability to earn, creative self expression and personal development. The following table will show the picture of women student growth in higher education from 1950-51 to 2014-15.

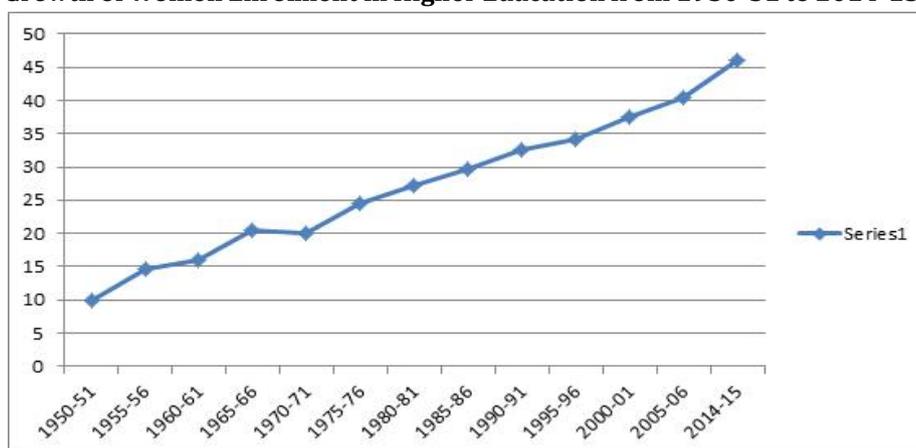
Table-1 Growth of Women Enrolment in Higher Education

Year	Men (000s)	Women (000s)	Total Enrolment (000s)	% to total enrolment
1950-51	157	17	295	10
1955-56	252	43	295	14.60
1960-61	468	89	557	16
1965-66	849	218	1067	20.40
1970-71	1563	391	1954	20
1975-76	2131	595	2426	24.50
1980-81	2003	749	2752	27.20
1985-86	2512	1059	3751	29.60
1990-91	2986	1439	4425	32.50
1995-96	4235	2191	6426	34.10
2000-01	4988	3012	8001	37.60
2005-06	6562	4466	11028	40.50
2014-15	18488	15723	34211	46

Source: Selected Educational Statistics, Govt. of India and UGC Annual Reports

Figure-1

Growth of Women Enrolment in Higher Education from 1950-51 to 2014-15



While more young women are enrolled in higher education than ever before – but majority are at the undergraduate level general courses. The enrolment of girls in higher education increased from 40.5% to 46% from 2005 to 2014, but female participation in India’s labour force declined to a low of 27% in 2014 from 34% in 1999, according to a 2015 study by the International Monetary Fund, about 12.49 million women are enrolled in undergraduate courses, but few continue to professional courses; 6,00,000 women were enrolled for diploma courses in 2013, the latest year for which data is available. Even fewer women sign on for PhDs; only 40% of PhD candidates are female.

As per the UGC Annual report 2016-17 , during 2016-17, distribution of women enrolment by state shows that Lakshadweep had the highest percentage (71.56%), followed by Goa with 60.38% in terms of women enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment of the state. There are 23 States/UTs which had higher enrolment of women than the national percentage of 48.11%. In the rest of the States, the percentage of women enrolled had been less than the national average, with Daman & Diu recording the lowest women enrolment of 37.66% only. In absolute numbers, Uttar Pradesh State had been on the top in enrolling women students (28.13 lakhs), followed by Maharashtra (14.35 lakhs), Tamil Nadu (13.17 lakhs), etc. The faculty-wise distribution of women enrolment in higher education 2016-17 is given in Table-

Table-2 Faculty wise Women Enrolment in Higher Education 2016-17

Sl. No	Faculty	Women	% of women to total
1	Agriculture	68187	0.48
2	Arts	5670875	40.05
3	Commerce	1915443	13.53
4	Computer Science	448118	3.17
5	Education	763496	5.39
6	Engineering/technology	1364660	9.64
7	Law	164293	1.16
8	Management	394462	2.79
9	Medicine	717203	5.07
10	Science	2474474	17.48
11	Vet. Science	11573	0.08
12	Others	163706	1.16

Source: UGC Annual Report 2016-17

Table shows that women enrolment in the faculty of Arts has been 40.05 % of total women enrolment, followed by the faculty of Science 17.48%, the faculty of Commerce 13.53%, etc., constituting 71.06 % in these three non-professional faculties. The professional faculty constitutes 28.94 % of total women enrolment. It means women are more enrolled in the general and traditional courses which again increases the educated unemployment problem among women.

SITUATION IN NORTH EASTERN REGION OF INDIA

The North Eastern region comprises of eight states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram,

Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The majority of the tribal of India inhabit in the North East India. Therefore the culture and the tradition of the people varied in nature. This region although endowed with rich natural resources, is economically and educationally backward with intra-regional disparity in the levels of development. However along with all other states of India, there has been remarkable development of education in the region in the recent years. All other states of North East India except Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have higher literacy rate than the national average. Still the situation in regard to higher education is not much satisfactory in comparison to other parts of India. The following table shows the number of higher educational institution in the North Eastern region.

Table-3 Higher Educational Institution in the North Eastern Region

						Total	Colleges
	State Univ.	Central Univ.	Private Univ.	Deemed Univ.	Inst. Of National Imp.		
Ar.P.	0	1	7	1	1	10	26
Assam	12	2	4	0	2		548
Manipur	0	2	0	0	1	3	86
Meghalaya	0	1	8	0	1	10	67
Mizoram	0	1	1	0	1	3	29
Nagaland	0	1	2	0	1	4	66
Sikkim	0	1	5	0	1	7	21
Tripura	0	1	1	0	1	3	36

Source: MHRD annual report

According to the Annual Status of Higher Education in States and Union Territories 2015 the GER in higher education has reached 24.3% in 2014-15. Although GER in higher education has considerably increased, but there is huge disparity among the different region and among the different

sections of the society. There exists a wide variation between male and female GERs in some states of NER, however in most cases unlike the other states of India ,female enrolment in some states is higher than male enrolment. The following table shows the GER of male and female in the different states of NER.

Table-4 GER in North Eastern Region 2014-15

State	Total GER	GER Male	GER Female
Arunchal Pradesh	28.3	28.6	27.9
Assam	14.8	15.4	14.3
Manipur	35.9	37.1	34.8
Meghalaya	20.5	19.8	21.2
Mizoram	23.3	23.5	23
Nagaland	15.6	15.2	16.1
Sikkim	30.3	28.4	32.4
Tripura	16.8	20.2	13.8
ALL INDIA	24.3	25.3	23.2

Source: ASHE 2015

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Although gender gap in the enrolment of students in higher education in the most of the North Eastern States is lower than the many other states of India, still the total enrolment cannot be considered as satisfactory. It is necessary that more women should be enrolled in higher educational institution for the development of the region. Although government has already taken certain measures but some concrete and practical steps should be taken to increase women participation in higher education. Some of the suggestion are

- Government should provide more subsidy for higher education for women. Government of Assam has already introduced free education for poor students at the undergraduate level. Other states may also follow it.
- Instead of only theory based education , higher education should be more skill-oriented
- Establish non-traditional curricular for women and extend state support for this.
- Improve transport facilities for women students in the rural areas.
- Education policy has to be taken to facilitate women participation in higher education.
- Provide easy Bank loan facilities for women students.
- Establish higher educational institutions in rural and tribal areas.
- Check sexual harassment within and outside institutions.
- Increase women teachers in co-educational institutions of higher education.

- Increase women representations in decision making bodies of higher educational institutions.
- Establish equal opportunity cell in all the higher education institutions, although UGC has granted Equal opportunity cell, but only few colleges have availed this facilities.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Discussion in the paper has shown the status of women participation in the higher education. It is seen that women participation is still very low in all states. Although some states of Eastern Region have higher GER in case of women, but overall enrolment position is much satisfactory. The government has been attempting with the objectives of gender equality, justice, social security, elimination of discrimination against women. UGC also has been extending its special support through the schemes like Women study centre, Equal opportunity cell, Capacity building programme, women hostel etc. to improve the access to women in higher education to achieve inclusive growth of women in the country. Our colleges must avail these opportunities to improve the enrolment of women in higher education.

REFERENCES

1. Reddy, P Kothandarami (2017): *Education and Empowerment for Inclusive Growth of women in India*, University News, Vol.55 No. 44,
2. UGC Annual reports of various years
3. MHRD Annual report 2014-15
4. ASHE report 2014-15
5. www.ugc.ac.in
6. www.mhrd.gov.in