



Promoting Gender equality through higher education: A step for mainstreaming gender in Higher Education

Abstract

The growth and development of any country depends upon its level of Education among its citizens. It is also considered as one of the important element for promoting growth and development of the country. The drive towards Gender equality in Higher Education started way back in 1998 in World conference on Education where it was decided that Gender Equality should be given at most priority in Education as it is considered to be one of the fundamental right of every human being. Hence, it is necessary that Higher Education should be accessible to all individuals. Therefore considering such immense importance of gender equality in Higher Education the present paper examine the meaning of gender inequality, access and equity. Further the paper also examines the importance of gender equality in the higher education system of India. In order to support the theoretical arguments, the paper also trends in male and female enrolment in universities. At the end paper lists some suggestions to actualize and promote Gender Equality in more better way.

Key words: Access, Equity, Inequality, Gender, University

Setting the context:

Education is considered as one of the important factor for Human development and its importance can never be understated. It is considered as one of the fundamental right of every human being irrespective of his/her caste, gender, racial, social, cultural background. It is fact that any developed nation is always a an educated nation as maximum financial resources of the nation is dedicated towards development of the education sector of that nation. In case of India it is developing nation and it is indeed progressing and marching systematically for improvement of its education sector. Notwithstanding the economic situation of the country in the past and in the present but still government is giving maximum efforts for the development of Higher Education in the country. There are many factors responsible for this for ex: the advancement of Information and Technology, awareness among its citizens about the importance of education etc. (Shaguri, 2013)

The Higher Education in India has experienced tremendous changes since the independence and it will witness tremendous change and up-gradation in the time to come. The major drivers behind this change is the economic and demographic changes in the country, It has been predicted in the reports¹ that the by the year

2020 Indian Higher Education system will be the 3rd largest higher education system in the world. As far as population dynamics is concerned, at present India accounts for over 50 % population is under 25 years of age therefore by 2020 there are chances that India will take over China with the largest tertiary age population (Everitt, 2014). In spite of these facts it is very important to note that the higher education system of the country is facing many challenges which are multifaceted and multidimensional in nature. However, the available data shows that the enrolment of students in higher education has increased but the reality is that there are still many students those who are not able to get access to Higher Education. The increasing Globalization and Privatization are the factors which contributes in increasing the magnitude of these challenges which is faced by the Higher Education system of the country. (Arunachalam, 2010)

Gender Equality, why it matters?

The question of Gender equality is matter of concern for the society today because it is this gender equality which lays the foundation of just and equitable society. Therefore, when it comes to higher education the issue of 'Gender justice and gender equality' is of immense importance. The question of Gender equality is important specially for girls and women perusing higher education because higher education is such a platform which opens the door of employment opportunity for them. Through gender equality accessibility to higher education becomes easy and as a result of it women can increase their strength to resist oppression, to protest against gender based inequality and to get a fairer deal in the society. The process of education and its attainment has an impact on all aspects of women's. The Nairobi Conference highlighted 'education' as the basis for the promotion and improvement of women's status and a tool to support their role as equal partners in society. It has been realized in free India that Gender equality in education is important. The Radha Krishnan University Commission Report, 1950 states that:

"there cannot be educated people without education of women, If general education had to be limited to men or women, that opportunity should be given to women; for then it would most surely be passed onto the next generation."

The framers of the Indian Constitution have also emphasized on the Gender equality because the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy has special reference to 'Gender Equality'. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. The underlying motive for enshrining gender equality in the Constitution and efforts thereafter is the realization that a happy and vibrant society will not be a reality without educated and empowered women and therefore, it is evident today that the matters concerning to gender equality are considered to be immense importance. Increasing female representation in all levels of higher education is seen as critical to increasing equality in the field of higher education and research. The need for equal opportunity for both men and women has consistently been affirmed by world bodies and national governments as paramount.

The gaps which still exists as far as the accessibility of higher education to marginalized groups is concerned has found its relevance in the matters concerning to policy making. After the thorough review of literature of research studies it has been found that socio religious affiliation and other factors play important role accessibility to higher education. In order to bridge these social and gender gaps, the policy of affirmative action (reservation) is adopted by the government for a long time but still there are several issues which needs

attention as they are still unresolved. The two major such issues are: 1. The choice of beneficiary or target population who can be given the benefits of reservation. 2. The duration of such benefits through affirmative actions. The 'reservation' debate has resurfaced with the inclusion of Other Backward Classes (OBC) for AA in Indian higher education.

Gender Equality in Higher Education: Where do we stand today?

Access to basic education has long been recognized as fundamental right human right. Article 26 of Universal declaration of human right adopted by united nation general assembly in 1948, proclaims that "every individual has right to education". The status of education as a basic human right has been reaffirmed and enshrined in different conventions and declarations since then, many of which explicitly affirm that the right to education applies to both girls and women and is critical to combat against discrimination in all its forms (UNESCO, 2012).

It is worth appreciating that in the last two decades the higher education system of India has transformed itself as mentioned above. Through such transformation it has been successful up to certain extent of creating the low cost high quality higher education for students of all caste and category. This has effected not only the enrollment level of the students but also learning outcomes of the students. The Indian Higher Education system follows the three tier University system in which every level or tier has its own objectives this has resulted the increase in strength of the University and cater increased its capacity to cater different educational needs of the marginalized and mainstream populations of the country. Taking it further the Indian higher education system with the effective use of Information & technology has enabled to decrease the gap which exists between the those sections of the society who want to get access to the higher education but they are not able to get access due to various reasons. There has been lot of initiatives to improve the condition of student teacher ratio by making teaching an attractive domain.

Higher education in India: the context for change

Higher education has a crucial role in India's ability to succeed in the modern global economic system. There is a significant rise in the higher education institutions and enrollment ratio of students in the country which has contributed immensely in the economic growth of the country The Indian higher education sector is heterogeneous. According to the report of the British Council on Indian Higher Education there are Indian higher Education is face with 4 type of challenges they are :

- **The supply demand gap :**

The supply demand gap is one of the major challenge which is faced by Indian higher education system because the rate of enrolment in higher education is 18 % as per the report of the British council whereas the when it comes to China it is 26 % and in Brazil it is 36 %. However, the Government of India is aiming to attain the 30 % gross enrolment to reach at the global level.

- **The low quality of teaching and learning:**

This is one of the second major challenge faced by Higher Education system of India. There are issues of quality in many institutes of the country mainly because of the factors like shortage of faculty, outdated curricula, lack of accountability etc.

- **Constraints on research capacity and innovation:**

Here the issue is mainly because the Indian higher education system does not have quality researchers, the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary topics and not encouraged, lack of research knowledge etc.

Rationale to Ensure Gender Equitable Access in University Education in India:

The need to ensure gender equitable access in university education according to are highlighted below

- Higher education institutions, especially Indian universities, have a critical role to play in the social and economic transformation of Indian societies. Increased women's participation in higher education is particularly important in the era of globalization that we live in. Globalization seems to favor those with higher levels of useful knowledge and skill (but threatens the livelihoods of the lowest skilled and low knowledge levels, and devalued by technological changes, those in traditional areas of skill). It is only through higher education that women can be sure to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to earn competitive incomes and thus lead meaningful lives in a globalized world. (Samuel, 2013)
- The contribution of women in social, economic and political development of the country is note worthy therefore it is necessary to address the issue of gender inequality in higher education. If basic education for women has produced unequalled socioeconomic benefits at the family and community levels, then higher education enables women to participate usefully in the social, political and economic lives of their communities and countries as leaders in business, in the professions and in politics. All these go to prove right, the popular adage that "when you educate a man you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman you educate a generation". (Samuel, 2013)

Higher Education scenario in India:

The demographic dividend of any country can be harnessed by providing quality education. The Indian higher education system is marching ahead towards the road of progress to become the third largest education system of India which will take over US in the next five years and China in the next 15 years. But in order to achieve this dream it is necessary that the complex structure of the system should be made simple with more possibilities. It has been predicted that by the year 2030 India will have the youngest nation in the world. The role of University Grants Commission is also praiseworthy in the development and advancement of Indian higher education system because it has through out the years since its establishment has provided academic, administrative and financial support to the system. The table given below (Table-1,2) shows the higher education scenario in the India. This statistics is necessary in order to have an idea of the progress it has achieved in the last five years. (Jaipuriya, 2014)

Table: 1 Male and female enrollment in Higher Education (2010-2015)

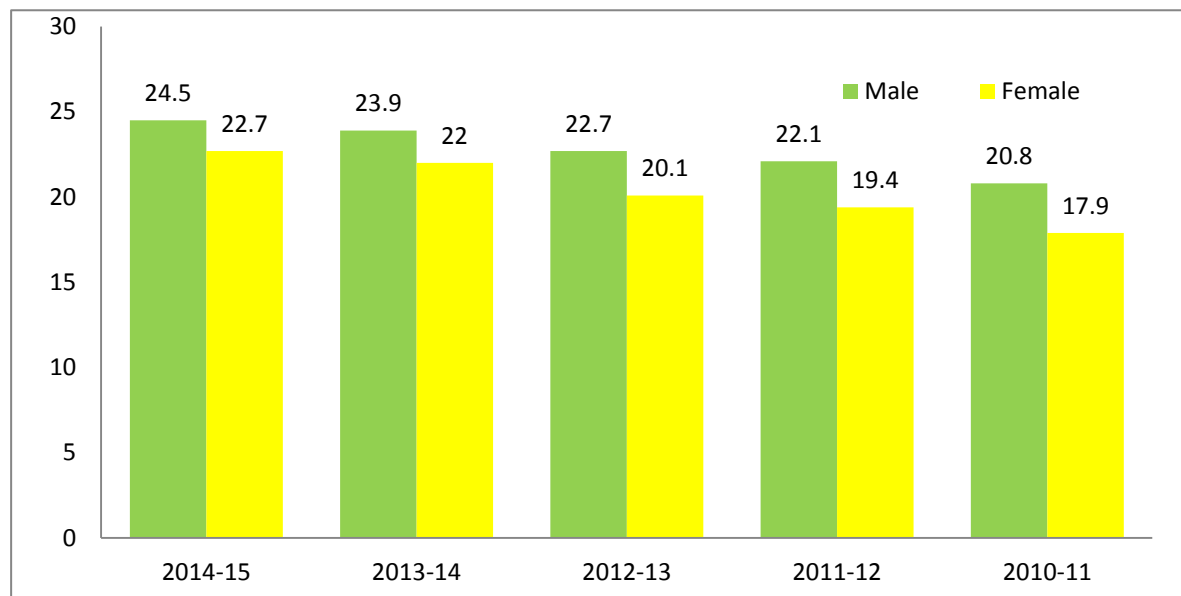
Year	Level												Grand Total
	Ph.D		M.Phil		Post Graduate		Under Graduate		PG Diploma		Total		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	19	14	15
2015-16	898539	30380	7704	9312	564920	605158	1327039	917185	39556	38920	2837758	1600955	4438713
2014-15	55252	37371	8670	9290	759679	721576	1709526	1150370	47496	39354	2580623	1957961	4538584
2013-14	56141	36057	9419	9423	949596	898539	2052417	1391648	115824	96532	3183397	2432199	5615596
2012-13	47655	32742	8870	9592	864777	774273	1978647	1289960	110883	29460	3010832	2136027	5146859
2011-12	41637	25620	11394	10976	837379	710569	1903815	1200098	120383	31796	2914608	1979059	4893667
2010-11	42670	25372	11048	10270	957105	658843	1734939	1029253	74219	37506	2819981	1761244	4581225

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2015-16)

Table: 2
Gross Enrollment Ratio (2010- to 2015)

Gross Enrollment Ratio (2010-11 to 2014-15)		
Year	Male	Female
2014-15	24.5	22.7
2013-14	23.9	22
2012-13	22.7	20.1
2011-12	22.1	19.4
2010-11	20.8	17.9

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2015 - 16)

Figure-1 Gross Enrollment Ratio (2010- to 2015)

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2015-16)

Estimated Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India of the year 2014-15 for male is 24.7 and for female is 22.7 which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. There is gradual increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in almost all the States in the country over the year. The graph showing GER of from 2010-2015 is shown in figure (1). The gross enrollment for female population at all India level was 17.9 in 2010-11 to 22.7 in 2014-15.

Way Forward: Priorities for Promoting Gender Equality in Education

Following steps are suggested in the report by UN women titled “Gender in Education: from access to equality”, 2012 for promoting gender equality in Education.

- Ensuring the availability of sex and age-disaggregated data and evidence necessary for planning and developing education policies from a gender perspective
- Guaranteeing the rights of women and girls to access quality education services through legal frameworks
- Increasing female rates of admission to scientific specializations as well as vocational and technical education
- Investing in early childhood education, with a special focus in higher education and dealing with gender equality awareness
- Reviewing University curricula with the aim of developing new curricula aimed at altering gender stereotypes that discriminate against girls and women

Key constraints in Gender Equality in Higher Education:

According to UNESCO in its document of thematic debate titled ‘Higher Education and Women: Issues and perspectives’ drafted in collaboration with International federation of University women, it put forwards

certain vital factors which indeed proves to be major constraints as far as gender equality in Higher Education is concerned. The constraints are as follows:

1. Societal attitudes: Societal attitudes to women which discourage their participation in decision-making. Education facilitates empowerment which is essential for the participation of women in all aspects of the development process. Furthermore, higher education provides the expertise usually required for the key posts which shape policy in all fields - hence its particular importance for women is obvious

2. Absence of Gender dimension of Higher Education curriculum: The University curriculum needs to be such which focuses on mainstreaming gender issues. The Beijing the conference on Women pointed out that the University curriculum must:

- Offer stimulating role models for women students which motivates and increase their confidence .
- It should focus on creation and exchange of knowledge and issues specifically pertaining to the issues of women

Concluding remarks:

To generate the enclave of higher education, it demands critical thinking, cultural consciousness, historical responsibility and create competent democratic citizens . Every page of higher education must unfold and directly coverage with knowledge development in its richest diversity. The paper examined the importance of Gender equality, the progress towards gender equality, strategies to priorities gender equality etc. It also touched on the rationale to ensure gender equitable access in Higher education, trends in male and female enrolment in higher education and factors that promote gender inequality in higher education in India. It is hoped that the discussion that the paper provided would lead to equitable access of male and female to higher education in India. Gender equality in higher education is of late getting increased focus and attention . Focus on gender equality in higher education reflects growing concerns that the inequality which was persistent over the time is now getting decreased as far as higher education is concerned.

Over the years number of social welfare legislations has been passed in favor of woman but still we find that status of women's education in our society has not achieved that desired standards. The big question mark we always faced with it is that, why in spite of various laws and programmes of educational development, aimed at enabling women to educate themselves and to play their role in our national life in an effective manner, is still a ' distant dream? It may not be denied that with the process of social change after the Independence the position of women's in education in India has changed, but as in other areas, here too the changes have either not touched at all, or they have not equally effected all sections of women in this vast country.

Women in higher education today thus present an extraordinarily complex scenario. Not High levels of disparity across social groups and classes go hand in hand with new forms of gender discrimination precisely at a time when more and more young women are accessing higher education. Unprecedented levels of public and private expansion in the last five years have raised the number of university-level institutions in the country to 600 according to UGC estimates for 2010–11, with almost 31,000 affiliated colleges and nearly 15 million students, making our system one of the largest of its kind in the world (John, 2012). More than ever before, the future of gender is being mapped by the interlocking markets of education and labour, by the

struggles over sexuality and by normative efforts to ensure the reproduction of compulsory marriage. Anyone genuinely interested in achieving even some degree of gender justice in the present would therefore do well to demand that much more from higher education.

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