



## Women and Gender Equality in Higher Education in India: Issues and Challenges

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**Abstract:** *The father of the Indian constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar once quipped, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved(Prakash, 2017)"; and to this day the empowerment of women reflects the empowerment of the society. The education of women and their development are indicators of the development of the nation as a whole. Educating a woman is often considered equal to educating an entire household. Particularly in India, where women have been a victim of gender discrimination since time immemorial, their rise holds additional value and validation of the nation's progress. Gender inequality has remained a prevalent issue of concern in Indian societies on various grounds that include general rights and education. A standard status of Indian women in the field of education and specifically in higher education is scarce and almost negligible. The education of women in India assures a constant and prolonged development of the nation. However, little or no efforts are made to ensure the quality and standard of the education they are imparted with. As Swami Vivekananda quoted, "To educate your women first leave them to themselves, they will tell you what reforms are necessary.(Singh, 2014)"*

**Key Words:** validation, progress, Gender, inequality, prevalent, concern, societies, various .

The incompetency of the educational standards and the under-representation of the Indian women in the management of higher education are well documented. Even though various schemes have been planned and proposed by the government to eradicate the barriers that hinder the development and progress of women, the prevalent misogyny and patriarchy in the societies pose as the most principal threat and opposition. In the name of culture and tradition, many women from rural backgrounds are forbidden the rights to education. Even though women have attained major success and proved to be paragons in various fields, their position in higher education still prominently lags behind that of men (Ghara, 2016). As written by Rafica Hammoud, "The position of women in higher education management cannot be treated in isolation from the general status of women in society, and from the general aims of economic and social development" (Hoteit & Debbas, 1970), the position that they hold in the society is reflected in their status in higher education. Education of women is

prioritized in India which has led to the involvement of women in various significant decision-making. Thus, the contribution of women in the managerial positions of the higher education committee plays a major role in uplifting the status of women belonging to different backgrounds in higher education. The percentage of women enrolling in higher education continues to be lesser than that of men despite the relentless efforts of the government and the educational boards (Nishank, 2020). The numerous researches in this field have revealed that the entrenched gender-stereotypical mindset of the people prevails to hamper women in higher education and employment. Providing primary education apart from the routine syllabus of the school and instilling in the students the ability to think and decide for their future will aid in crossing various hurdles that women have to face being a part of a male-dominant society. Out of the 46.2% women who enroll for higher education, only 24% enter the professional level and from that percentage, only 19% make to the senior-level roles



in management(Pandya, 2019). The major issues that still remain highly prevalent are the conservation attitudes of the societies, limited access, traditional stereotyping, and discrimination in educational institutions. Despite the groundbreaking that women have attained over the past two decades, they still face challenges to receive equal and unbiased treatment in various sectors including that of education.

The gender disparity in the Indian educational systems is evident and prominent all across the nation. Even in the states with the highest literacy rates, the percentage of women fall short in comparison to that of men. Since women have proved over the recent decades that if given the right opportunity they have the ability to conquer every field, this lag in percentage proves the incompetency of the system. Despite new policies and programmes launched by the government, the disempowerment of women has been on a rise especially in the rural regions of the nation. Various measures have been taken to resolve the persisting gender gap in education and for suppressing the power of negative social values and beliefs. The degradation of female power in households remains a major cause of hindrance for their development on the grounds of education. Over the years the system has also failed to provide women with the right and convenient sources in educational institutions.(Singh, 2007) The lack of security for women both within and without the institution, the unfriendly environment in the classrooms, inflexible and stereotypical curriculum, and scarcity of female staff members and the increasing rate of crime against women within the educational grounds contribute towards forming walls of hindrances. Apart from these issues, social concerns such as early marriage, early pregnancy, and the delegated feminine roles that they must abide to further build up the walls. The anachronism mentality and beliefs of society feed them with the fear of deterioration in the social circle. The lack of strong and independent role models in the rural regions also accounts for their

lack of interest and confidence in continuing their education. An uncertain future and the predicament of being employed that follows higher education also contributes to the hindrances. According to the 93rd Constitution Amendment and the 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." Thus, irrespective of their gender, children are granted an opportunity to attain education, leading to the increase in the number of enrollments. However, for higher education, along with the social and cultural factors, economic concerns also prevent women from getting opportunities to continue their education. In the rural regions where women are considered to be a burden since their time of birth, the change and development in the mindset of numerous families are highly commendable. However, the stereotypical roles assigned to women since their childhood is still highly prevalent. These issues underline the differences in the status of women hailing from urban and rural backgrounds.

The ones coming from the rural regions of the nation need to break the social and economic shackles along with that of the gender discrimination. The fact that urban women are granted better and more opportunities with more certain futures and career plans that the rural women highlight the discrimination shown on grounds of education. These urban-rural differences bring to light the inadequacy of the educational system. Due to these regressive beliefs that still prevail in the rural regions, women are robbed of numerous higher education opportunities.

Over the past two years, the nation has witnessed a historical rise in percentage in the enrollment of women for higher education. However, despite this rise, the steady growth of women still remains uncertain. Educational play a significant and vital role in developing India and thus the efforts to educate women and ensure a certain and definite future for them remains a priority. The participation of Indian women in



higher education serves as a yardstick for the development and growth of the nation. Since the reign of the British, India has been exposed to the possibilities of education which leads to the revolutionary change in both the growth and economy of the nation. The female population of the country comprises half the entire population but their education stills lag from that of men. Since the Independence of the nation, relentless efforts are continuously being made to uplift women in education and as stated by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the first vice president of India, "there cannot be educated people without educated women. If general education has to be limited to men or women, the opportunity should be given to women. From them, it would most surely be passed on to the next generation." The education of women is dual-faced, which includes both the social and individual aspects. While an educated woman has the understanding to overcome these hindrances and to take her stand, uneducated ones only know to comply with the stereotypical standards set by the society (Nath, 2014). Even though the access to education has improved and made easy over the years, the willingness of the individuals to be educated and the disposition of the families to allow their daughters to go to school remains hesitant. In cases where women have the zeal and passion to study, the social and economic hurdles crush their dreams. In order to provide an equal and unbiased platform of higher education for women, it is essential to introduce schemes that offer financial support and extra scholarship for meritorious women that will encourage them to continue their higher education. They must also be trained to find stable career options in parochial fields and must be introduced to various opportunities with certain futures. It is extremely essential to counsel the parents of the students to prevent the misattribution of higher studies and employment. The orientation of higher education must be expanded and initiated in various remote regions. Apart from the general curriculum, non-traditional activities must be

included to break the stereotype of the educational curriculum. Proper security measures must be taken both inside and outside the institutional premises to avoid any sort of physical or sexual abuse. Proper transportation means must also be arranged and provided to the female students. They must be encouraged and rewarded for their hard works and meritorious performances. They must be given an opportunity to train for dealing with the problems that they might face socially in the future. The education given to them must aid them in gaining a better perspective about themselves and the career that they want to choose. Their classroom education must be integrated with practical knowledge of life and profession. Based on the personal experiences and backgrounds of the students, they must be given special attention. The progress of the students must be monitored and awarded accordingly regularly. The techniques and methods used for teaching must be unbiased and not gender-stereotyped. The lessons must aid in the development of professional self and personal self individually for all students. Women must be facilitated with the experiences that will aid them to gain confidence and boldness to stand up for themselves and to make crucial decisions. The faculties of the institution must introduce the opportunities available in the future for the students. When still in school, they must be educated about the various fields of higher education available for them to enroll and must also be briefed about the career opportunities in the future. Women must be provided with sufficient bank loans with lesser rates of interest for their education. More number of higher educational institutes must be established in rural and remote regions. The number of female faculties must also be increased and the students must be made aware of their surrounding environments. The institutes must establish equal and unbiased opportunities for all students and the representation of women in higher education management must be more emphasized on. The government must also take proper measures to ensure undisrupted education of female students and



must implement policies that prevent abrupt educational breaks. Women pursuing higher education must be provided with proper stipends and financial aid for their research projects. They must also be given vocational training along with the academic curriculum. Female students who are away from home must be provided with proper hostel facilities.

**CONCLUSION-** Discrimination on grounds of gender has been a burning issue for ages in the Indian society. The importance of higher education must be stressed and emphasized upon since the early school stages to equip the students with the interest and willingness to study further. As quoted by Michelle Obama, "When girls are educated, their countries become stronger and more prosperous", the higher education of women in India will ensure a better and brighter future for the nation. When given the opportunity women have proved their worth and abilities time and over again. They have manifested themselves in various fields that were once ruled only by men, they have substantiated their knowledge and skills that will contribute to the development of the nation. When provided with a standard education with adequate resources, women are sure to bring pride and honor to India. Even though the nation has succeeded in breaking numerous stereotypical beliefs and irradiated various social issues that belittled women in the society, the path of higher education is still to be conquered. The participation of women in higher education must be encouraged and empathized upon on every educational platform. Their development will aid in attaining women and gender equality in higher education and in overcoming the issues and challenges they face in the process.

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