Higher Education and Women Participation in India

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Abstract

Education is the key yardstick by which the growth and development of a country can be delineated and as such it has occupied an honoured place in the society. None can deny that in the life of an individual as well as society education has a vital role. In the case of individual education helps to discipline the mind, sharpens the intellect and refines the spirit. Education is the nourishment of the mind with knowledge and as such it helps in the formation of an integrated personality of an individual.

Education has a special significance in the context of a quasi-traditional or transitional society like India. Admitting the fact that the inducement of social change as one of the fundamental functions of education, the report of Indian education commission (1964-66) stated:

“The realization of the country’s aspirations involves changes in the knowledge, skills and values of the people as a whole. If this ‘change in a grand scale’ is to be achieved without a violent revolution there is one and only instrument that be used – Education”.

In this paper I will try to delineate the present picture of higher education in India and women participation in it. In this paper I shall try to delineate the picture of women participation in higher education in India. I shall also mention the necessity and factors responsible for women participation in higher education. Finally effort will be made to give some suggestions which can accelerate women participation in higher education in India.

Keywords: Education Commission, Higher Education, Institutions, Women, Women Education

Introduction

Higher education means the education beyond the level of secondary education. It is often assumed that education imparted by the colleges or universities are higher education. But in fact higher educational institutions include Professional Schools in the field of Law, Theology, Medicine, Business, Music and Art. It also includes other institutions like Teachers’ Training School and Technological Institutions. Moreover, institutions for training of highly skilled specialists in the field of economics, science, technology and culture of various types of higher schools are treated as Higher Educational Institutions. Because these institutions allow those candidates in their campus who have completed their study at the secondary level. Thus in general the term ‘Higher Education’ refers the education at the degree level and above.

Background of Higher Education in India

In India Higher Education had its roots in early time as well. In the 5th century BC Taxila was the earliest recorded centre of higher education in India although there is a debate with its status – whether it was university or not. In the modern sense of the term ‘University’ the Nalanda University was the oldest University system of education in the World. With the establishment of the British Raj in India, the western education became ingrained into Indian society. But in the pre-independence era there was very limited access to Higher Education. From the year 1883 till, the independence both the number of colleges and the enrollment of students in India were found to be very low. The following table will show the picture of Higher Education in India from pre-independence to post independence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1883</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1947</th>
<th>1961-62</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Colleges</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>2,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Enrolment</td>
<td>16,088</td>
<td>90,677</td>
<td>2,28,881</td>
<td>11,77,245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://www.education.nic.in/cd50years/u/2j/3j/2J3J0201.htm p; 1 of 4 Dated 31/8/2011

Growth of Higher Education in India
India occupies an important position in respect of Higher Education. Comparing with other countries in the world, India’s position in the field of Higher Education system is third after the United States and China. After independence numbers of both the Higher Educational Institutions and number of students have been increasing. The following table will show the picture-

Institutions of Higher Education and their intake capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of University Level Institutions</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>117</th>
<th>320</th>
<th>367</th>
<th>467</th>
<th>544</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Colleges</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>7,346</td>
<td>16,885</td>
<td>18,064</td>
<td>25,951</td>
<td>31,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Teachers (in thousands)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Students Enrolled (in millions)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Higher Education in India (strategies and Schemes during 11th Plan Period (2007-12) for universities and colleges) UGC Report January 2011 Chapter 1 and 2 pp.1 and 3. Total University level institutions by 01-07-2010.

University Level Institutions in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Universities</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Universities</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deemed to be Universities</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions of National Importance (by State Legislation)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions of National Importance (by Central Legislation)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Universities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thus since independence higher education in India has spread rapidly throughout India so much so that it is the third largest system in the world. This is because of the visionary planning of the leaders of our country.

Place of women in Higher Education in India

In India the female education has its roots in the British Regime. In 1854 the East India Company acknowledged women’s education and employment. Initially this education was limited only to primary school level education and only the richer section of the society enjoyed this facility. Thus as it was confined only for a small section of people in society so the literacy rate for women increased from 0.2% in 1882 to 6% only in 1947. It is very unfortunate to say that for centuries higher education for women has been neglected. In this connection I may refer the suggestions given by the University Education Commission in 1947. The report of the said commission revealed that they were against female education. In their recommendation they wrote “women’s present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability” (Report of the University Education Commission, Government of India, 1948-49, Vol.(i), chapter XII)

But in spite of this, it is fact that in post independence period the female literacy rate was 8.9%. Thus in 1958, the government of India appointed a national committee for the education of women. The committee submitted report in favour of women education. The government of India accepted most of the recommendations of the committee.

There is a possibility of revolutionary change in India’s higher education system and this is women participation. In some elite institutions we find that number of female students is more than male students and there is a possibility to increase this trend. It is true that number of males is outnumbered in comparison with female. One of the reasons for this is rampant sex selection and cultural factors. It is common feature that from the time of birth girls are discriminated in subtle and crude ways. But in spite of this, it is a great advancement that the presence of women in colleges and universities are growing. Not only this, it is also found that in some most
competitive higher educational institutions women are gaining entry without availing gender quota. This is undoubtedly credit for them.

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.

Necessity Of Higher Education For Women
Almost half of the population in India is occupied by women. They are the half of the human resources. But it is very unfortunate to say that for long years there have been a strong bias against women and thereby there is a tendency to deny equal socio-economic opportunity for them. This neglecting attitude towards women is prominent in many respects particularly in the field of education. None can deny the fact that education is the fundamental agents for the socio-economic development of a country. But women access in the domain of education has not been fairly treated.

There are two different views on the question of women participation in higher education - traditional and modern. The traditional view supports women’s education to equip them to become better wives and mother. This view believes that women’s present education is entirely irrelevant in their lives. It is only waste of time and this does not help them to solve the problems of their daily life. This view believes that modern educated women are neither happy nor contended nor socially useful. She is misfit in life and needs opportunities for self expression. But modern attitude visualizes education as an instrument for women’s equality and development.

Theoretically the need of higher education for both males and females is the same. But practically it could be said that female education is more important than that of male. In this connection I may refer a statement of philosopher-president and noted educationist Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1948). He says “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.”

Women education has two aspects- individual aspect and social aspect. It is education which increases women’s abilities to deal with the problems of her life, her family, her society and nation. Education increases confidence in a woman. An educated woman can easily understand the demerits of early marriage and high birth rate. They have the attitude of gender parity among their children right from health care, nutrition, education and even career. The fruits of education are enjoyed not only by the woman concerned but passes to her family in later life.

In a word, over all development of a society depends on the development of its total members. But if half of its members are legged behind, obviously it will create hindrance to the development.

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 2005-06.

Women student growth in higher education from 1950-51 to 2005-06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men (000s)</th>
<th>Women (000s)</th>
<th>Total Enrolment (000s)</th>
<th>Women as Percent of all students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-56</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>14.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>20.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>1563</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>2131</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>2426</td>
<td>24.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>2752</td>
<td>27.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>2512</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>3571</td>
<td>29.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main Factors Influencing Women In Completing Higher Education:

There are different factors which are responsible for influencing women in completing higher education. Some of these are mentioned below.

a) In comparison with men, women are more firm in their mission of success. So in education stream also they are strongly motivated to succeed.

b) As they are firm in their mission, so their performance is also remarkable. Thus on the basis of their merit they occupy the domain of higher education.

c) Now a day the tendency of prejudice against women has been reduced and this helps women to enter in the domain of higher education.

d) Increased number of higher educational institutions helped women to complete their higher studies.

e) There are some courses which provide scholarship facilities for women. This also helps many poor female students to complete their higher studies.

f) There are many institutions which have the provision of hostel facilities for girls’ students. This is also an important factor for girl students to complete their higher studies.

g) Educational institutions meant for girls attracted many conservative families to get admitted their wards in higher educational institutions.

h) Expectation for education-based employment is very high amongst women. This factor works very silently in completing their higher studies.

i) In some cases women students get inspiration from the teachers working in higher educational institutions which help them to complete their higher studies.

j) Women zeal to take equal responsibility of the family pushes them to complete their higher studies.

k) It cannot be denied that lucrative pay scale for the employees working in higher educational institutions attracted women in higher studies.

l) In most cases women are dependent on male both in economically and in decision making and as such they suffer more. To get relief from this, they go for higher studies.

m) In some cases highly educated women are considered as equivalent to ‘dowry’ of a bride.

n) Above all, it is fact that outlook of modern society has been changed in many respects which helps women to complete their higher studies.

But in spite of these it is true that women participation in higher education amongst schedule caste, schedule tribe (both plain and hill) and Muslim community is much lower in comparison with other communities. This is also a serious matter for our country. The government of India should have to take special initiative for the improvement of higher education among these communities.

Suggestions for Promoting Women Participation in Higher Education

a) Introduce attractive scholarships for both financially poor students and meritorious students to encourage women students in higher education.

b) Provide counseling for both family and person concerned at the secondary stage of education.

c) Make skill-oriented higher education.

d) Establish non-traditional curricular for women and extend state support for this.

e) Improve transport facilities for women students.

f) Education policy has to be taken to facilitate women participation in higher education.

g) Establish more female educational institutions.

h) Provide Bank loan facilities for women students.

i) Establish higher educational institutions in rural and tribal areas.

j) Check sexual harassment within and outside institutions.

k) Increase women teachers in co-educational institutions of higher education.

l) Increase women representations in decision making bodies of higher educational institutions.

m) Establish equal opportunity commissions for higher educational institutions.
n) Introduce stipends, scholarships and fellowships for women studying in higher educational institutions.

o) Government should formulate and implement policies for stopping drop out of girl students in secondary and lower classes.

p) Establish post-secondary vocational training institutions for promoting the entry of women in higher education.

q) In many cases early marriage leads to withdrawal of women from higher studies. This must be stopped.

r) Increase hostel facilities for women students.

s) Above all, attitudes of the male oriented society must be changed. This will undoubtedly help in increasing women participation in higher education.

Conclusion

It must be admitted that women are in no way lesser than men. They have all the power and capacity as that of men. But they fail to manifest themselves for different reasons. In men dominated society they get rare chance to express their voice. In some cases father or husband create hindrance in their path. They even do not allow them to leave the home for higher studies or work. We should have to change our thinking, our attitude towards women. We should have to think that women are not just reproduction. They have feeling, thinking and all these as the men have. They have all the capacities as that of men and thereby they can do all these as men, if not more. So their power and capacities must be recognized. It is only then women participation in higher education will be enhanced.

References:


