



## WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT:

*The gender related development index or GDI (Gender Development Index) measures the levels of women's human development relative to men. A comparison of the GDI with the HDI (Human Development Index) helps to assess the extent of gender equality prevalent in society. Though the GDI in Karnataka (0.637) is much higher than the all-India figure (0.609) in 2001, Karnataka is sixth among the 15 major states in gender development and seventh in human development. At the international level, Karnataka's rank in terms of the GDI is 99th as against 103rd for the entire nation. Hence, there is need to study the status of women in higher education. Hence, the present study is significant to know about the status of women in higher education.*

**KEY WORDS:** - Gender Development Index , international level , higher education.

### INTRODUCTION

The first three modern universities at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were established in 1857 as examining bodies for existing 25 colleges and modeled on the lines of the University of London. It was from this point onwards that higher-education system grew steadily in size, especially due to the national freedom struggle, which gained strength and momentum in the first quarter of 20th century. In 1947, there were 20 universities with 500 colleges enrolling about 100,000 students. The system has continued to develop with accelerated rate during the last six decades (1947–2007) and has become third largest in the world, next only to China and the USA, with 431 universities, 21,000 colleges, about 12 million students and 505,000 teachers. Indian universities and colleges account for over 10% of the total enrollment in higher-education institutions in the world, but still it is too small to accommodate 138 million domestic youth in the age-group of 18–24 years. The reported Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 12% is very small as compared to world's average of 23% and an average of 56% for developed countries. The government of India proposes to increase the GER to 15% by year 2012 and to 21% by 2017 through large-scale expansion of the system by way of opening new institutions and enhancing the intake capacity of the existing ones.

Higher education plays a vital role in the economic and social development of a country. It provides a wide range of increasingly sophisticated and ever changing variety of trained manpower needed in education, engineering, medicine, agriculture, management, communication, etc. It produces researchers, who through their activities, deepen and extend frontiers of scientific and technical knowledge leading to innovations, which energize engines of economic growth and development. Apart from developing human resources, higher education turns out thinkers who reflect on critical problems that affect humanity and thereby ensure its survival and growth. Thus the single most important indicator of national future can be said to be the state of his higher education. During ancient times in India the educational system was mostly individualistic – education was being provided by a few learned persons, in their individual capacity as a

matter of devotion, sacrifice and service, and education was being received by a group of individuals out of their own interest, love and requirement for learning. Teachers used to live in the bosom of nature in a sylvan with very limited needs and hardly any anxieties of life. They were held in high esteem and they devoted their heart and soul to the furtherance of education. Students were living in the Ashrams with their teachers, sharing all the rites as well as responsibilities there. In such residential institutions there were close and cordial relations among the teachers and pupils. The pupils were gaining knowledge and acquiring learning according to their own individual interests and abilities.

### **WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION:**

The history of India, including that of the ancient period, records that women have enjoyed a high status in the society. They were provided educational opportunities comparable to men. The tradition has continue throughout the ages. Many educated women sometimes outshined men and challenged them in debates on crucial literary, philosophical and social issues<sup>22</sup>. The learned women were known as Brahnavadini (women having attained the knowledge of the Supreme Being) or Mantravid (having the knowledge of mantras) or Pandita (learned women). Even during the Muslim period many women made a mark in the field of education.

Although in the Vedic period women had access to education in India, but they gradually lost this right. However, during the British period various socio-religious movements led by some eminent persons emphasized women's education in India. Social reformers like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar took various initiatives to make education available to deprived sections of the society including women. However, women's education got a boost after independence and the new government took effective measures in this regard. Women's education in a society plays an important role in the overall socioeconomic development and help in improving the quality of life in the family setup. Educated women tend to promote education of their girl children and provide them guidance in future. Moreover, educated women help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and healthy growth of the population.

At the end of the nineteenth century, social reformers ventured farther to provide widows and other marginalized women with education that would equip them to earn for themselves, and to become self-reliant and independent. In the face of severe opposition they pursued this mission. Nursing and schoolteaching, seen as nurturing occupations, were amongst the very few that society then, grudgingly, accepted as permissible for women. Since health services for women and schools for girls were being set up, there was a steady demand for nurses and for women school teachers. Those who were willing to work were readily absorbed. But, as late as the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century it was believed that high school or university educated women should not condescend to work unless circumstances forced them to do so. The more fortunate were expected to be socially active and to do voluntary social work. A few women did nevertheless enter the professions of law or medicine or take up school or university teaching, not out of necessity but for self-realization. But, these were bold exceptions to the rule. Moreover, they generally had to opt out of marriage in order to realize their aspirations.

At the beginning of the twentieth century when Gandhi drew women into the movement for freedom he specifically affirmed that their education was vital, both for the success of the movement and for the development of the country as a strong nation after freedom had been won. The education of women had an important place in the agenda that the Congress party spelt out for the tasks to be accomplished after the country acquired independence. But, surprisingly, even Mahatma Gandhi's encouragement for the education of women did not open venues for their gainful employment. Societal attitudes to their employment remained largely unchanged until the decade of the forties. During the Second World War a shortage of manpower, combined with an unprecedented rise in the cost of living forced middle-class families in cities like Bombay and Calcutta to accept the employment of their educated women. This brought about a sea change in the urban outlook on the employment of women. It was no

longer viewed as an unfortunate circumstance. Slowly but surely it came to be appreciated as a healthy effort to supplement the family income.

After independence both the education and the employment of women gained a fresh boost. The Constitution of independent India underlined their equal status as citizens. Government plans and programmes at the State as well as the central level emphasized their education. With the revolution of rising expectations and standards of life more and more educated women were willing to work. There were growing job opportunities into which they were readily absorbed. Meanwhile, both the concept of women's right to work and the actual employment of educated women received a massive push from the feminist movement that had been gathering strength through the International Women's Decade between 1975 and 1985. By the Sixth Plan period, official documents were beginning to talk about the 'empowerment' of women and their right to equal opportunity to work.

Today, in India, women are to be found in every sphere of employment at all levels. While most educated working women continue to give primacy to their responsibilities as wives, mothers and home-makers and subscribe to the notion that their careers are to be accommodated within these responsibilities, the single minded career women is no longer the rare exception. But, in the staggering heterogeneity of Indian life, shades of modernity co-exist with total orthodoxy and traditions in different phases of change.

During the period of British rule also women's education received significant impetus through deliberate policies. However, the progress remained mainly limited to school stage. In 1947, out of a total enrollment of over 12 million children in elementary schools, 3 million (25%) were girls<sup>25</sup>. Literacy rate of women was 8.30% as against 25% of men. Literacy is a significant indicator of a society's overall level of development.

In 1947, out of the total enrollment of about 250,000 students (including those pursuing pre-university courses) in higher education around 23,000 (about 9.2%) were women. Nearly 87% women pursued general education in Arts, Science, Commerce, and Liberal Arts including languages. After independence, higher-education sector attracted greater attention of the native government than elementary and secondary education sectors. University Education Commission (1948), the first commission in education set up by the government of free India, laid special emphasis on the education of women and recommended that in view of the similar fields of activity for men and women and some specific requirements of women, maximum facilities should be given for education in Home Economics and Home Management.

Until recently, improvement in the educational status of women was advocated principally on the grounds of human rights, social justice, and equality. It is now evident that literacy for women can also produce significant social, economic and personal benefits such as better personal and family health, lower fertility, the readiness to participate in new economic activities, and female empowerment. Highly educated women have higher labor force participation rates and remain in the workforce much longer than women with lower levels of education. Girls' and mothers' education is important in determining fertility rates. The latter, in turn, is related to the preschool cognitive development of children and their subsequent achievement in school. Higher education for mothers is associated not only with healthier children, but with children's acquisition of knowledge, language, and literacy skills as well. Further, parent and child interaction at the preschool level promotes the development of cognitive, language, and preschool literacy skills in children.

**Table No. 1 Caste-wise and Gender wise Enrolment in Higher Education**

(Figures in Lakhs)

Year	All Category Students*			SC Students			ST Students		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2005-06	74.14	46.90	121.04	10.29	5.82	16.11	3.90	2.20	6.10
2006-07	79.69	50.47	130.16	11.85	6.50	18.35	4.39	2.62	7.01
2007-08	85.10	54.51	139.61	14.51	8.51	23.02	6.13	3.35	9.48

2008-09	92.84	59.45	152.29	14.87	8.75	23.62	6.73	3.85	10.58
2009-10	102.63	69.47	172.20	15.00	9.39	24.39	6.81	4.00	10.81

\*Excluding SC/ST Students

Source: Statistics of Higher and Technical Education for the Years 2005-06 to 2008-09 and 2009-10 (Provisional)

Like enrolment of women in higher education, there was also change in subject choices of women in higher education. Following table revealed the women's higher education in different subjects.

**Table No. 2: Women Enrolment: Faculty-wise from 2006-07 and 2010-11**

Sl.No	Faculty	Women Enrolment (in Lakhs)	Total Women Enrolment %	Women Enrolment (in Lakhs)	Total Women Enrolment %
		2006-07		2010-11	
01	Arts	24.02	51.01	29.05	41.21
02	Science	9.01	20.18	13.49	19.14
03	Commerce/Management	7.35	16.46	11.37	16.12
04	Education	0.83	1.85	3.24	4.60
05	Engineering/Technology	1.86	4.16	8.01	11.36
06	Medicine	1.63	3.64	3.30	4.68
07	Agriculture	0.11	0.24	0.25	0.36
08	Veterinary Science	0.04	0.08	0.07	0.10
09	Law	0.73	1.64	0.84	1.19
10	Others	0.33	0.74	0.87	1.24
	Total	45.91	100.00	70.50	100.00

Source: University Grants Commission, Annual Reports, 2006-07 & 2010-11

Even though, there is gradual increase of women's participation in higher education, increasingly women are participating in Arts and Science education and only few of the girls are participating in engineering, technology, management, medicine, Veterinary Science, etc.

#### CONCLUSION:

It is observed that due to globalization, even though higher education is equally available for all and increased higher education opportunities for all, still it has become commercial and costlier. Still few of the respondents have certain misconceptions that the scientific and technical subject disciplines are difficult, need thorough studies and chosen by intelligent students. There is need to counsel and guide the women students to keep away these students from such misconceptions. The respondents expected skills, intelligence, employment based, ethics and morality oriented, more knowledge oriented, etc from higher education.

Higher education has given higher status to women in society apart from socio-economic equality and economic independence. Majority of the female students are aware about only few schemes of UGC for encouragement of women's participation in higher education and even majority of the respondents have suggested for more schemes and extension of the existing UGC schemes for more female students. To increase women's higher education, it is essentially need to organize the awareness programmes especially in rural areas and the UGC has to announce more scholarship schemes for poor women students to pursue higher education. Impact of higher education on women helped to achieve gender equality in all aspects including employment of women in all sectors. There is also increase in knowledge and modern life style of

women. Further, there is considerable decline in gender based violence in family and society due to higher education among women.

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