



## WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Higher education has been portrayed as a great equalizer and a powerful tool of upward social mobility for reducing socio-economic disparities and accomplishing an inclusive society. It is expected that strengthening of the higher education system would increase access to education for women and enable them to pursue careers of their choice and contribute their full potential to the nation.*

**KEY WORDS:** Higher education , socio-economic disparities and accomplishing.

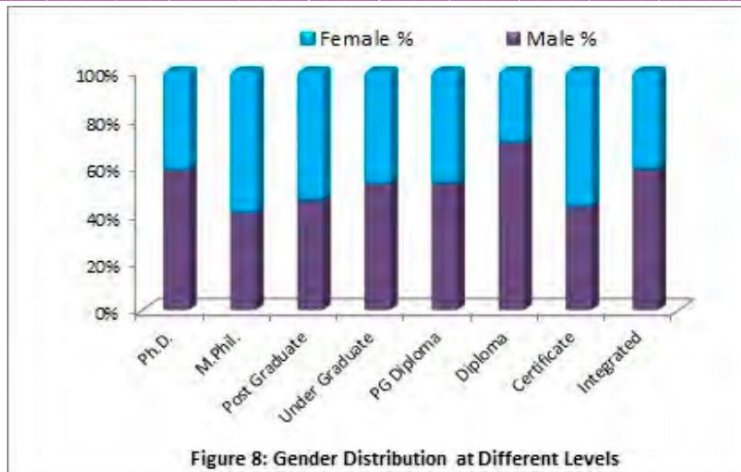
### INTRODUCTION:

As a matter of fact, education has the latent force in it which can demolish mental, social and economic barriers faced by women and usher in women empowerment in all realms of life. Hence, what is of utmost importance is to expand opportunities of higher education to all women who deserve and desire it. But unfortunately, one of the biggest challenges confronting India's higher education system is gender disparity. Large scale disparities still exist in respect of enrolment rates, access to education etc. India needs to bridge the gender gap in the educational sector, particularly in higher education, on an urgent basis in order to promote gender equity and also to usher in women empowerment.

India has the 3rd largest higher education systems in the world next to China and USA. But as far as access to higher education is concerned, India's figure (19.4) is significantly less than other countries like US (89), Russia (76), UK (59), Malaysia (40), and China (24). A matter of particular concern in the Indian context is the steep drop-out rate after the elementary level which restricts the enrolment in higher education. However, the biggest challenge confronting India's higher education system is gender disparity. This situation is distinctly prominent when reviewed through indicators like total enrolment, Gross Enrolment Ratio, enrolment at various levels of higher education, Gender Parity Index etc. Since women constitute 48.5% of the total population of the country, abolishing the gender gap in education is of utmost importance for overall development of the country as well as for empowerment of women.

### GENDER DISTRIBUTION AT HIGHER EDUCATION

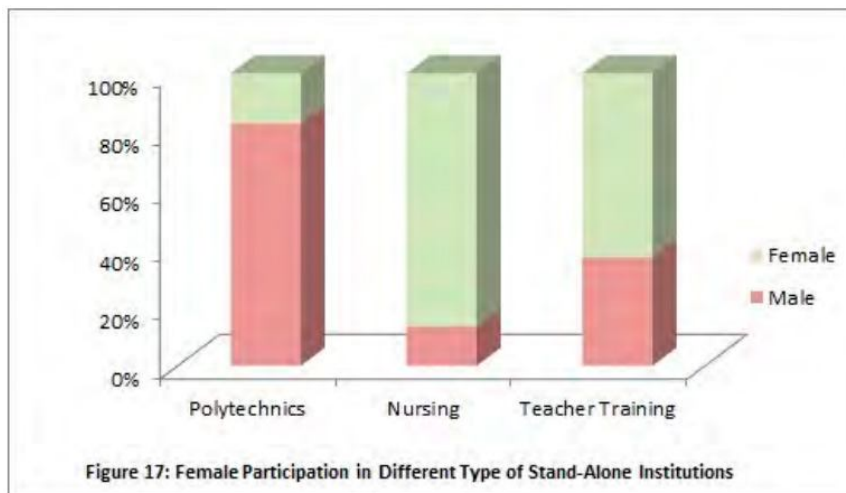
Taking a look at the Male-Female ratio at each level in Figure 8, the trend is of higher males than females in almost every level, except M.Phil., Post Graduate and Certificate, where in, the female enrolment is slightly higher than male enrolment. Student enrolment at Under Graduate level has 53.3% male and 46.7% female. Diploma has a skewed distribution with 70.4% males and 29.6% females. Ph.D. level has 59% male and 41% female. Integrated levels has 59.6% male and 40.4% female. PG Diploma student enrolment also projects lopsided picture with 53.8% male students and 46.2% female students.



Source: Census 2011

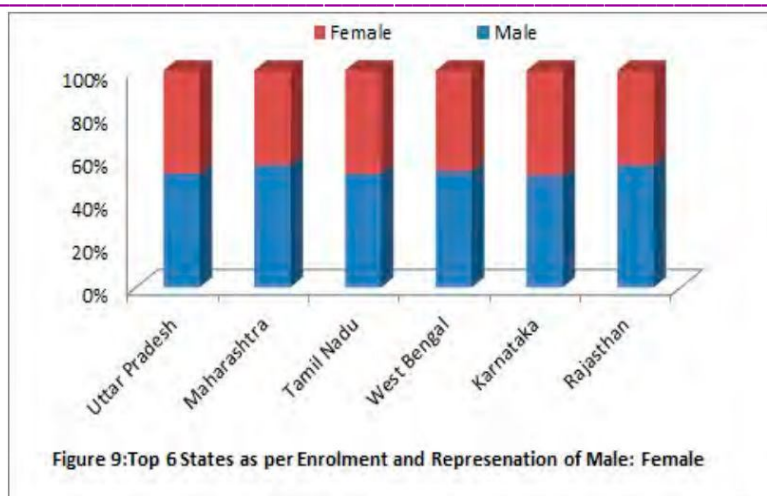
It can be seen from the above table that for the female the highest share of enrolment is at the under-graduate level followed by post-graduate and Diploma. But what is significant is male enrolment at each level of higher education exceeds that of female. The reverse picture is seen only in case of Certificate courses which, for obvious reasons, is of lesser importance than the other categories. The stream-wise enrolment at under-graduate level is shown below for both male and female.

The same scenario can be noted in this case as well. Lesser female participation is clearly evident in case of highly specialized and technical streams like different branches of engineering except medical sciences. Since majority of the women enroll in non-technical and/or general streams (which are less job-oriented), their possibility of securing a well-paid job and becoming financially independent gets severely restricted. This obviously negates women empowerment to a considerable extent. which is also evident in the figure 17 below.



Source AISHE 2013.

This trend of relatively higher male enrolment than female enrolment of students is also seen across the levels in the state-wise distribution seen in figure 9.



Source: AISHE 2013.

One more factor effecting enrollment of girls in higher education is the existence of sufficient number of colleges and universities in the country. It is necessary for boosting up enrolment of women in higher education. It is also important that these educational institutions cater to the preferences and needs of all the women candidates unbiasedly.

Much of the concern is there exists wide gender gap in the GER in the country which is clearly evident from the tables above. Lesser number of women enrol in higher education due to certain socio-cultural factors and furthermore, inadequate infrastructural support reduce their participation. The government has set the target of a GER of 30% by 2020 which requires boosting up of enrolment from around 14 million to 40 million. Moreover, the Twelfth Plan also aims at creation of additional employment capacity of 10 million which has to raise the GER to 25.2% in 2017-18.

In general, at the national level the number of girls enrolled is lesser than the number of boys. However, the female-male ratio has been improving over the years. The importance of education for inclusive development has been acknowledged through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well. The third MDG is promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. This involves elimination of gender disparity in all levels of education.

## CONCLUSION

The indispensability of higher education among women has been well recognized. Higher education is the most vital instrument for social and economic transformation in the as well as for horizontal and vertical mobility. Consequently, it must be designed so as to address the issues of access, equity and excellence in a coordinated manner. An analysis of participation of girls in higher education through certain indicators of higher education reveals that large scale divergences still exist with regard to enrolment figures. It is imperative for us to note that statistics of enrolment rates and GER do not necessarily reveal the true picture with regard to gender disparities. As has been noted in the case of many states and union territories, gender biases are deeply rooted within the educational systems which are manifested through low GPI scores. The Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), which is the landmark scheme of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, highlights wide disparities in the higher education system. Although gender gap in literacy has come down over the years, yet, a lot still remains to be done in transforming this into a fruitful demographic dividend. Higher education, perhaps, is the most crucial factor which leads to the accomplishment of human development and this, in turn, leads to gender equity and women empowerment. Accessibility of higher education by women is not sufficient, alone, to curb the problems plaguing India's higher education sector. Hence, what is of utmost importance is attainment of

gender based equity and parity coupled with increased accessibility. It is only then that the true benefits of education may be reaped and empowerment of all sections of women, irrespective of class, caste and creed, may be accomplished. This will undoubtedly accelerate the pace of development in the country.

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