



Gender Disparity In Higher Education System In India - An Exploratory Study In Indian Context

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Abstract: This article majorly focuses on the gender disparity in the field of higher education in Indian context. The reality of existence of gender inequality in Higher education in India is complex and exists in all spheres of life. In this study an attempt has been made to explore the factors that lead to this phenomenon. This article has followed narrative review format to know the subject matter in detail. This review attempts to explore the factors that lead to gender inequality in Higher education of Indian youth. The data is enumerated through electronic search and since the literature on this area is in Indian context, all types of research studies have included. The electronic search included SCORPUS, PsycINFO, Google Scholar and MEDLINE. This research emphasizes the critical role of socio-cultural practices in hindering female representation in the Indian higher education system. By fostering female education, Indian women can become self-reliant, adequately socialized, and empowered to contribute significantly to the nation's development. It is imperative to raise awareness in society about the significance of women's education, creating a better world for women to live and thrive.

Keywords: Equality, empowerment, equity, inequality, disparity, higher education

I. Introduction:

We live in the 21st Century where the opportunities are endless. But in reality, whether all sections of our society have access to all these doors of opportunities is a remarkable question even in 2023. The greatest wealth of today's world is knowledge and skills of our young generation. Swain (2023) highlights this growth as a knowledge – centred economy and which resulted in the shift of concentration from primary level education to higher education. When the discussion is about the higher education, always the question of equity and equality will appear in the context. It was believed in the older days that educating girls are not mandatory and waste of time. But when time passes this belief had zero role in the society and the whole world has recognised the importance of educating the young girls.

The idea of ignoring girls' education is rejected since it is proved that the educated women can bring about revolution in the society in all means. Gender disparities in developmental policies and programs have far-reaching consequences, often resulting in missed opportunities for critical development. The education of girls is not only a matter of social justice but also a powerful catalyst for societal transformation. Achieving gender equality in education is vital for the overall development of human resources. It is widely recognized that by educating a woman, the benefits extend beyond her own personal growth to positively impact the entire family

unit. With the significant responsibilities that women often bear for their families, an educated woman is better equipped to nurture the health, nutrition, and education of her children, while also becoming an active agent in driving social and economic development within her country (Chutia, Borah & Hazarika, 2014).

The interdependence between educational success and economic success is apparent across diverse societies. Sahoo (2016) mentions that educational attainment serves as the cornerstone of progress, with literacy acting as the fundamental building block for further knowledge acquisition. However, the impact of education extends beyond economic prosperity. It plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and shaping national identity. Through education, individuals gain a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives, resulting in improved public opinion and increased active participation of marginalized groups in the democratic process.

Historically, no society has achieved true liberation—be it economic, political, or social—without a solid foundation of educated women. The empowerment of women through education creates a heightened awareness of their rights, capabilities, and the various choices and opportunities available to them. By equipping women with knowledge and skills, education acts as a transformative force, enabling them to overcome barriers and contribute to their own empowerment as well as the development of their communities. Furthermore, numerous studies have established a robust correlation between female education and several crucial developmental indicators. These indicators include increased economic productivity, improved health outcomes, delayed age at marriage, lower fertility rates, enhanced political participation, and the facilitation of effective investments in future generations. The evidence underscores the immense potential of educating women as a means to foster inclusive and sustainable development.

In light of these observations, this research article aims to explore the critical role of addressing gender disparities in developmental policies and programs, with a particular focus on the transformative power of education for girls. By delving into the multifaceted impact of education on women's empowerment and its broader societal implications, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

II. Methodology Adopted:

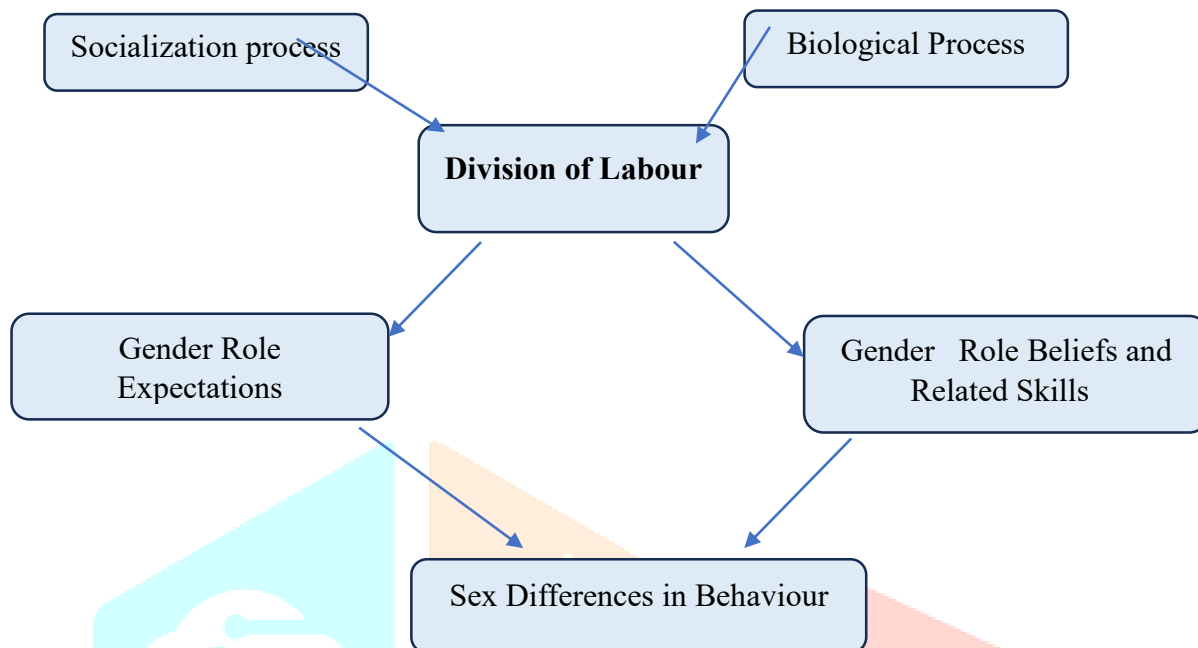
This study utilizes a narrative review format to analyze the subject matter and gain insights into the state of girls' education in India. The specific objectives of the study are to identify the factors that contribute to the gender disparity in Indian education system, examine the current status of girls' enrolment and accessibility in higher education and uncover the overall impact of girls' education on the country's development. To achieve these objectives, data from various databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, MEDLINE, Scopus and others were collected. Given the focus on the Indian context, a wide range of research studies and articles were included in this article.

III. Theoretical Framework

Theories are backbones of any research study. This study has adopted Social Role theory as the theoretical framework to support the gender differences in the society.

III. i: Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012)

Social learning theory is originated from the concept of gender differences which focuses on the social structure, majorly on the division of labour between both genders, and this theory is also called as Social Structural Theory.



This theory emphasizes on the differences across cultures in the patterns of gender differences.

IV. Significance of the Study

Women's empowerment has emerged as a significant societal concern in recent times. Education plays a crucial role in empowering women by providing them with opportunities to participate equally in socio-cultural, political, and economic spheres. Consequently, conducting in-depth research on gender disparities in higher education has become imperative in the present-day context. This paper focuses on exploring the specific issues related to gender disparity in higher education and identifying the contributing factors. The findings of this study can assist policymakers in comprehending the socio-economic factors that influence this problem and formulating effective policy measures to address and eliminate such inequalities.

V. Results and Discussion

V. i. Socio-Cultural factors of Gender Disparity in Indian Higher education System

Gender disparity in education perpetuates the lower socio-economic status of women acting as a root cause that hinders their access to equal opportunities in society. Despite education being recognized as a crucial element for human resource development and economic growth many developing and underdeveloped countries still grapple with gender disparities (Barauh, 2012; Chaudhry & Rahman, 2009). This has resulted in limited progress and growth in Africa and South Asia over the past three decades (Moheyuddin, 2005). Interestingly, even in some of the wealthiest countries like Europe and North America, gender asymmetry persists in higher education and professional training suggesting the involvement of additional factors contributing to this issue.

The limited participation of girls in education, both at the school level and beyond, can be attributed to several well-known factors. These factors include:

1. The societal bias and preference for boys' education, leading to a lack of support for girls' education.
2. The absence of a favourable market or demand for girls' education.
3. The expectation for parents to prioritize girls' involvement in sibling care, domestic responsibilities, or contributing to the family's economic needs.
4. Adherence to traditional gender roles that limit girls' educational opportunities.
5. Insufficient representation of female teachers, resulting in a lack of role models for girls.
6. Negative perceptions and discouragement surrounding girls' education, acting as deterrents (Upasana & Ram)

Indian culture is widely recognized for its prevalent gender bias. Within the framework of family units, a patriarchal system is ingrained, wherein the father is assigned the role of ensuring the family's welfare. Over the course of centuries, women in India have faced marginalization and have been portrayed in distinct ways across various domains such as history, literature, religion, art, education, and culture. Gender bias persists extensively across various stages of life, manifested through practices like foeticide, female infanticide, son preference, early marriage of girls, dowry system, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and numerous customs that devalue women and girls. This bias remains prevalent throughout the life cycle. In the present-day developing world, over 1 billion individuals, predominantly women, endure intolerable poverty conditions. Additionally, disparities in the distribution of economic resources based on gender play a significant role in perpetuating women's poverty (Rustagi, 2004).

Even in the present day, a significant number of girls continue to be deprived of basic primary education. The prevalence of girls' illiteracy can be attributed to various cultural and economic factors, including instances of verbal and physical violence, inadequate sanitation facilities, considerable distances between home and school, and the potential dangers that hinder parents from sending their daughters to school. Women's education in India is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. It cannot be attributed to a single factor or cause for the country's remarkably low literacy rate among women. Instead, it is influenced by a combination of various factors, encompassing social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, political, and administrative aspects (Upasana & Ram)

According to USAID, (2008) several factors contribute to the barriers faced by girls' education. Firstly, religious factors play a significant role, as certain religions do not provide equal treatment to women compared to men. Women often depend on men, such as their father, husband, or son, which leads to a lack of priority given to women's education. Secondly, geographical factors come into play, where the perceived vulnerability of girls prevents them from attending schools located far away. While boys are allowed to attend schools, girls are often denied this opportunity due to concerns for their safety. Lastly, biological factors also play a role, as girls are inherently at a physical disadvantage compared to boys. This differentiation is a result of biochemical factors.

The realization of gender equality is a foundational prerequisite for the full realization of human rights for both women and men. The fundamental concepts of justice, equality, diversity, and peace are intricately woven into the objectives of global citizenship education, a growing focus of numerous countries. The primary aim of global citizenship education is to impart knowledge and awareness among children regarding the most pressing social and economic challenges that exist worldwide. Within the context of global citizenship education curricula, deliberate efforts are made to engage in discussions on gender equality and to illustrate the wide-ranging impact of gender-based issues faced by female citizens on global, national, and local communities (Karak & Sen 2019; Kapur, 2019).

V. ii. Accessibility of Higher Education to Girls in India

Gender inequality in India encompasses disparities in health, education, economic opportunities, and political representation between men and women. There exist diverse international indices that evaluate India's performance on these aspects, both individually and as a whole, yet these indices remain subject to controversy. The prevalence of gender inequalities and their underlying societal causes significantly impact India's sex ratio,

women's overall health throughout their lives, educational achievements, and economic conditions. This multifaceted issue of gender inequality in India is of concern to both men and women. While some argue that certain measures promoting gender equality may disadvantage men, a comprehensive examination of India's population reveals that women face significant disadvantages in several crucial dimensions (Karak & Sen, 2019).

Over the years, there has been remarkable growth in higher education in India. The number of higher educational institutions (HEIs) has experienced significant expansion, rising from approximately 30 universities and 695 colleges in 1950-51 to around 1,043 universities (as of 2019-20) and 42,343 colleges (as of 2019-20), as reported in the recent AISHE Report. Presently, India holds the third position globally in terms of the size of its higher education system, trailing only the United States and China. The rise in enrollment numbers corresponds with the proliferation of HEIs over time. The overall enrollment in higher education has surged from 0.21 million in 1950-51 to approximately 22 million in 2011-12, while the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) has increased from 0.40% in 1950-51 to 27.1% in 2019-20 (Swain, 2022).

Based on the AISHE 2019-20 survey, an analysis of the male-female ratio reveals that, with a few exceptions like M.Phil., Post Graduate, and Certificate programs, the percentage of male students is generally higher than that of female students at each educational level. At the Undergraduate level, male students account for 50.8% of the enrollment, while female students constitute 49.2%. However, there is a significant gender disparity in Diploma programs, with 65.1% male and 34.9% female students. At the Ph.D. level, 55% of students are male and 45% are female. Integrated programs have a male-female ratio of 56.2% and 43.8% respectively. In PG Diploma programs, male students make up 53.6% of the enrollment, while female students comprise 46.4%. This trend of higher male enrollment compared to female enrollment is observed across most states. The top six states in terms of total student enrollment are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. However, when considering the total number of institutions, the ranking slightly differs, with Uttar Pradesh having the highest number (8985), followed by Maharashtra (6952), Karnataka (5806), Rajasthan (4036), Andhra Pradesh (3634), and Tamil Nadu (3583). It is noteworthy that these six states, with the highest student enrolment, account for approximately 53.8% of the total student enrolment in India. In these states, the proportion of female students constitutes nearly 53.7% of the total female students enrolled, while male students from these states make up 54% of the total male students across India (Kanti, 2018).

The significance of education in fostering the growth and development of a nation cannot be overstated. Since the post-independence era, the government has been actively working towards promoting equal access to higher education through various policies and schemes. However, several factors such as low completion rates in higher secondary school, economic constraints, low mean per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE), and limited educational attainment of parents, as well as their occupation, pose obstacles to female enrolment in higher education. Additionally, cultural and societal norms unfavourably impact the education of girls. It is crucial to join forces and implement collaborative efforts to address these gender disparities and strive for a more equitable future (John, 2012).

VI. Empowering Girls: Suggestions to Break Barriers in Education for India's Future:

Promoting girls' education is crucial for the overall progress of the nation. We can contribute to ensuring that girls receive their rightful education by providing support in the following ways:

- ❖ **Ensuring Equal Educational Opportunities:** Plan endorses community-driven initiatives that foster inclusive attitudes towards equal access to education, while raising awareness about its significance for both genders. Moreover, Plan supports the establishment of gender-sensitive learning environments to guarantee that both boys and girls can fully exercise their right to education.
- ❖ **Educating Boys on Gender Equality:** Recognizing the benefits of gender equality for all individuals, regardless of gender, Plan actively involves boys in initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality. By engaging boys, Plan seeks to transform social norms within entire communities and foster a collective mindset that embraces gender equality.
- ❖ **Promoting Gender Role Transformation:** By raising awareness within families and communities, we can cultivate positive attitudes towards girls' education. Additionally, it is vital to foster open dialogues with parents, challenging prevalent gender stereotypes.

It is imperative for higher authorities, community members, NGOs, and every individual in India to shoulder the responsibility of eliminating barriers that hinder girls' education in our society. Every citizen must recognize that national development cannot be accomplished without ensuring girls' education, and therefore, must actively contribute to this cause.

VII. Conclusion

Education plays a crucial role in shaping quality of life and driving societal transformation. It serves as a means to create awareness among individuals, prompting nations worldwide to strive for gender equality across all levels of education. Special benefits, such as fellowships and fee concessions, are provided to girls to encourage their participation in education. Nevertheless, women face exclusion from various spheres of life, impeding the progress of nations. By including women in education, their self-esteem and confidence can be developed, fostering a positive self-image. Moreover, education equips women with critical thinking skills, enabling better decision-making and empowering them to make informed choices regarding their own education and that of their children. Furthermore, education raises awareness of rights and entitlements among women, enabling them to participate equally in all domains. The empowerment of women through education would greatly contribute to society, politics, and the economy, as women gain independence and actively engage in various aspects of life.

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