



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Gender Inequality In Access To Higher Education In India

(Evidence From All India Survey On Higher Education Data)

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ABSTRACT:

Gender inequality in access to higher education persists as a significant challenge in India despite notable progress in recent decades. This abstract presents a comprehensive review of the prevailing disparities, contributing factors, and potential solutions regarding gender imbalance in higher education enrolment in India. Drawing upon a wide range of scholarly literature, government reports, and statistical data, the abstract highlights the multifaceted nature of gender disparities in educational attainment, particularly at the tertiary level. It proposes a series of policy recommendations and interventions aimed at fostering gender equality in higher education.

In conclusion, it has been found that there is urgent need for concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, civil society organizations, and communities to dismantle the structural barriers that perpetuate gender disparities and ensure equal opportunities for all individuals irrespective of their gender.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Higher Education, AISHE Report

THE PROBLEM:

The problem of gender inequality in higher education is a complex and pervasive issue that has been extensively explored in the academic literature. This literature review synthesizes key findings from various studies, providing insights into the multifaceted nature of gender disparities in access to higher education.

Numerous studies (Srivastava, 2018; Desai & Kulkarni, 2017) have consistently highlighted the significant gap in enrolment rates between male and female students in higher education. Despite advancements, women continue to face barriers in accessing and participating in tertiary education, particularly in certain fields like STEM disciplines. (Kabeer, 2005; Agarwal, 2010) underscores the impact of deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms on educational opportunities for women. Prevailing patriarchal structures, societal expectations, and traditional gender roles often dissuade families from investing in the education of female members, perpetuating gender disparities in higher education. (Duflo, 2012; Chakraborty & Mehta, 2016) emphasizes discipline-specific gender imbalances within higher education. Women remain under represented in STEM fields, which are often associated with higher economic opportunities. This

underrepresentation reflects and reinforces broader societal stereotypes about gender roles and abilities. (World Bank, 2019; Sinha, 2020) highlight structural challenges within the educational system, such as inadequate facilities, lack of gender-sensitive policies, and limited financial support for female students. These challenges contribute to higher dropout rates among women, limiting their overall participation and success in higher education. (Palriwala, 2005; Rao, 2018) documents the prevalence of gender-based violence and harassment on university campuses. Such incidents create hostile environments, dissuading female students from pursuing higher education or causing them to drop out, further exacerbating gender inequalities. Duflo, 2012; Klasen, 2019) highlight the long-term economic consequences of gender inequality in higher education. Limited access to education for women restricts their employment opportunities, perpetuating wage gaps and hindering overall economic development.

The problem of gender inequality in higher education is deeply rooted in societal norms, educational structures, and cultural expectations. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses policy changes, cultural shifts, and targeted interventions to create an inclusive and equitable higher education system.

PAST DECADE TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA AS PER AISHE REPORTS:

Over the past decade, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India has witnessed significant fluctuations and trends, as reported by the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE). The AISHE, conducted annually by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, provides valuable insights into the state of higher education in the country. Here's an overview of the trends in GER over the past ten years based on AISHE data:

Overall Increase in GER: The past decade has seen a notable increase in the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education in India. According to AISHE data, the GER increased from 19.4% in 2010-11 to approximately 27.1% in 2019-20. This indicates a growing trend towards higher participation in higher education across the country.

Expansion of Higher Education Infrastructure: One of the contributing factors to the rise in GER has been the expansion of higher education infrastructure, including the establishment of new universities, colleges, and institutions across various states. Government initiatives such as the Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) have played a crucial role in enhancing access to higher education.

Focus on Inclusive Education: Efforts to promote inclusive education have also influenced the trends in GER. Various policies and programs have been implemented to increase access to higher education for marginalized and underrepresented groups, including women, scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), and persons with disabilities (PwDs).

Gender Disparities Persist: Despite the overall increase in GER, gender disparities in higher education persist. AISHE data consistently show that the GER for males is higher than that for females. Efforts to address gender inequality in access to higher education remain a priority for policymakers and educators.

Regional Disparities: Regional disparities in GER continue to exist, with variations observed across states and union territories. While some states have achieved significant improvements in GER, others lag behind due to socio-economic factors, infrastructure constraints, and other challenges.

Challenges in Quality and Equity: Alongside the increase in GER, challenges related to quality and equity in higher education persist. Issues such as low employability of graduates, unequal distribution of resources and gaps in access to quality education remain areas of concern that require concerted efforts for improvement.

The trends in Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education over the past decade reflect both progress and ongoing challenges. While there has been an overall increase in enrolment, efforts to address gender

disparities, regional imbalances, and quality concerns are crucial for building a more inclusive and equitable higher education system in India.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AISHE REPORT 2020-21:

The 2020–2021 All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) is released by the Ministry of Education.

- 1) For the first time, the number of students enrolled in higher education has surpassed 4 crore, rising by 21% from 2014–15 and 7.5% from 2019–20.
- 2) Enrolment of women surpasses 2 crore, up 13 lakh between 2019 and 2022.
- 3) Enrolment of SC students increased significantly in 2020–21—by 28% and for female SC students, by 38%—when compared to 2014–15.
- 4) Significant increases in ST student enrolment of 47% and female ST student enrolment of 63.4% were observed in 2020–21 compared to 2014–15.
- 5) Notable rise in OBC student enrolment from 2014 to 2015 of 32% and 39%, respectively, for female students.
- 6) Significant rise in student enrolment in the North Eastern Region from 2014–15, up 29%, and up 34% for female students in 2020–21.
- 7) For every social group, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has increased over the prior year.
- 8) The number of students enrolled in distance education grew by 7% between 2019–20 and 2020–21.
- 9) In 2020–21, there were 70 more universities and 1,453 more colleges than there were in 2019–20. GPI rose from 1.05 in 2020–21 to 1 in 2017–18.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND GROSS ENROLLMENT RATIO AT HIGHER EDUCATIONAL LEVEL: TREND ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE FROM AISHE REPORT

The percentage of eligible people between the ages of 18 and 23 who are enrolled in higher education is determined by the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).

GER AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL (18-23 YRS) 2016-2021			
INDIA	ALL		
YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH
2020-21	26.7	27.9	27.3
2019-20	24.8	26.4	25.6
2018-19	24.4	25.5	24.9
2017-18	24.5	24.6	24.6
2016-17	24.3	23.8	24.1

Source: AIHES, Ministry of Education (different years).
(GER: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO)

Overall, the GER for higher education has grown, rising from 24.1 percent in 2016–17 to 27.3 percent in 2020–21. This encouraging trend suggests that more students are enrolling in higher education. Additionally, the data shows a significant difference in GER between genders, with GER in females continuously being lower than in males throughout all years. The GER of males and girls differed by 1.2

percentage points in 2020–21. In 2016–17, the GER was 23.8 percent for women and 24.3 percent for males. The GER increased to 26.7 percent for men and women in 2020–21.

Over the years, there has been a consistent upward trend in the enrolment of females. "Female enrolment climbed by 18.7% during the course of five years, from 2.01 crore in 2020–21 and 1.74 crore in 2017–18 to 2.07 crore in 2021–22. Approximately 50 lakh more women are enrolled now than there were in 2014–15. There were 1,57,23,018 female students enrolled in 2014–15.

55% of the 91 lakh more enrolments overall between 2014 and 2015 have been made up of female enrolment. According to the research, this indicates that there has been a greater growth in female enrolment than in male enrolment.

It demonstrates how the goal of the Indian educational system is to enable women to forge their own professional routes. Unquestionably, programs like focused scholarships, females-only hostels, and flexible learning alternatives have been extremely important in fostering this inclusive atmosphere.

In a number of undergraduate programs, the proportion of women students stayed higher. These programs included the Bachelor of Arts (113 female to male ratio), the Bachelor of Science (108 female to male ratio), the B.A. (Hons)-Bachelor of Arts (Honours) (124 female to male ratio), and the B.Ed.-Bachelor of Education (176 female to male ratio). 17.05 lakh students were enrolled in medical science studies, with 42.4% being male and 57.6% being female. Programs such as the Master of Arts (M.A. per 100 males), Master of Science (M.Sc. per 100 males), Master of Commerce (M.Com. per 100 males), and Master of Education (female per 100 males) have very high female participation rates. Of the 2.12 lakh students enrolled at the Ph.D. level, 47% are women. According to the data, female enrolment in PhD programs has actually doubled, from 47,717 in 2014–15 to 98,636 in 2021–22. In engineering and technical studies, however, the proportion of female students is still low—29.1% compared to 70.9% of male students.

STATE-SPECIFIC GER, FEW OBSERVATIONS:

On the brink of independence, the percentage of female enrolment, which was formerly less than 10% of all enrolment, is currently trending upward.

According to the Ministry of Education's "Annual Report 2020–21," states like Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and the north eastern states are leading the way in terms of female GERs (gross enrolment ratios).

In addition, the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) report 2019–20 indicates that there has been an improvement in the proportion of female students enrolled at the undergraduate level, with 50.8% of male students and 49.2% of female students enrolled.

In Chandigarh and Puducherry, two UTs, and in Delhi, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Kerela, and Telangana, GER values are above 40% and over 60%, respectively.

States like Kerala, Telangana, Haryana, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Chhatisgarh have seen increases in women's participation in education of 32% and 18.7%, respectively, between 2015–16 and 2016–17.

SOURCE- AISHE's report (2019-20)

Gross Enrolment Ratio (per cent)			
2019-20			
States/UTs	Higher Education (18-23 Year)		
	Boys	Girls	Total
Andhra Pradesh	38.3	32.2	35.2
Arunachal Pradesh	36.5	34.3	35.4
Assam	17.4	17.2	17.3
Bihar	15.8	13.1	14.5
Chhattisgarh	17.4	19.6	18.5
Gujarat	22.9	19.6	21.3
Haryana	26.6	32.5	29.3
Himachal Pradesh	35.7	46.4	40.8
Jammu & Kashmir	31.7	33.2	32.4
Jharkhand	21.0	20.9	20.9
Karnataka	31.2	32.7	32.0
Kerala	32.9	44.7	38.8
Madhya Pradesh	24.2	24.2	24.2
Maharashtra	33.5	31.0	32.3
Manipur	37.7	38.9	38.3
Meghalaya	24.2	28.0	26.1
Mizoram	27.2	25.1	26.1
Nagaland	16.5	20.5	18.5
Odisha	23.0	20.3	21.7
Punjab	25.1	32.1	28.2
Rajasthan	24.3	23.9	24.1
Sikkim	83.6	67.6	75.8
Tamil Nadu	51.8	51.0	51.4
Telangana	34.8	36.4	35.6
Tripura	22.5	18.0	20.2
Uttar Pradesh	23.7	26.9	25.3
Uttarakhand	40.7	42.3	41.5
West Bengal	20.3	19.6	19.9
A & N Islands	17.7	22.3	20.0
Chandigarh	43.2	65.6	52.1
D & N Haveli	7.4	12.9	9.4
Daman & Diu	4.4	11.4	6.1
Delhi	44.9	51.8	48.0
Goa	23.8	34.6	28.4
Lakshadweep	3.6	11.5	7.5
Puducherry	41.0	52.6	46.3
All India	26.9	27.3	27.1

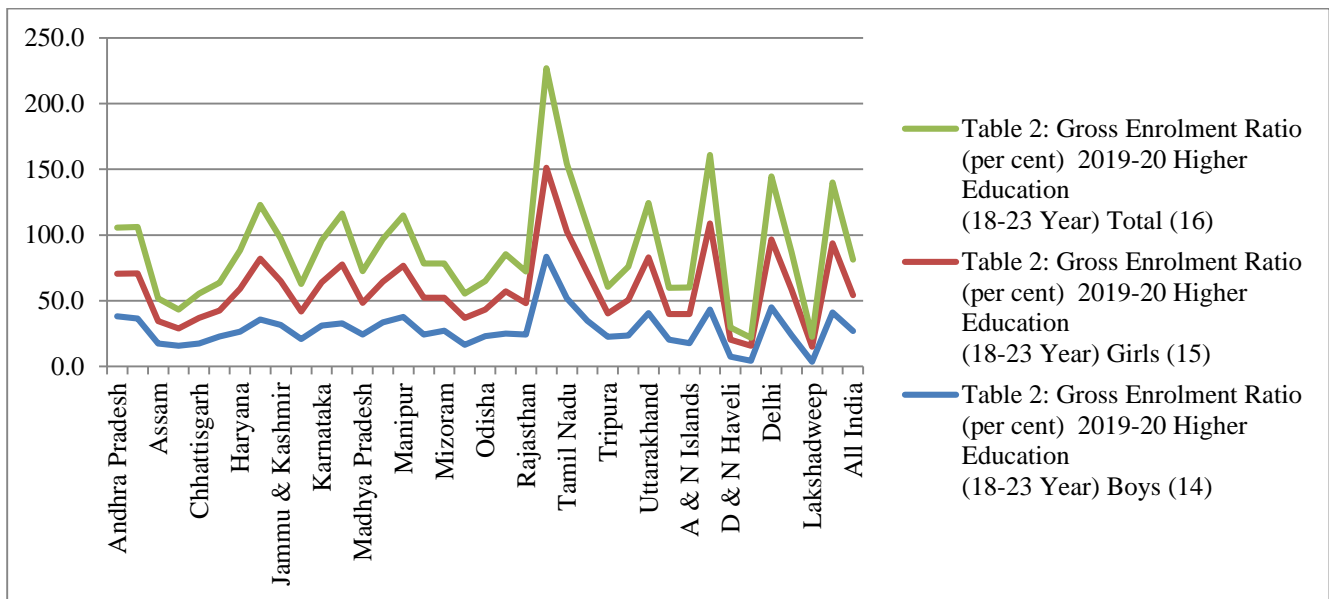
Uttar Pradesh: With a 21.8 percent overall GER in 2020–21, Uttar Pradesh has a lower GER than the national average. GER has, nevertheless been steadily rising over time for both males and females.

Tamil Nadu: Both male and female GERs have continuously been high in Tamil Nadu, with the state having the highest GER overall in 2020–21 (49.3%). Both the male and female GER for SC and ST are lower than the overall GER; however, the GER for SC and ST females increased significantly between 2016–17 and 2020–21.

Kerala: Kerala has consistently maintained a high GER for males and females over the years, with the overall GER in 2020-21 at 39.8 percent. The GER for SC and ST males and females is lower than the overall GER, but there has been a significant increase in GER for SC and ST females from 2016-17 to 2020-21.

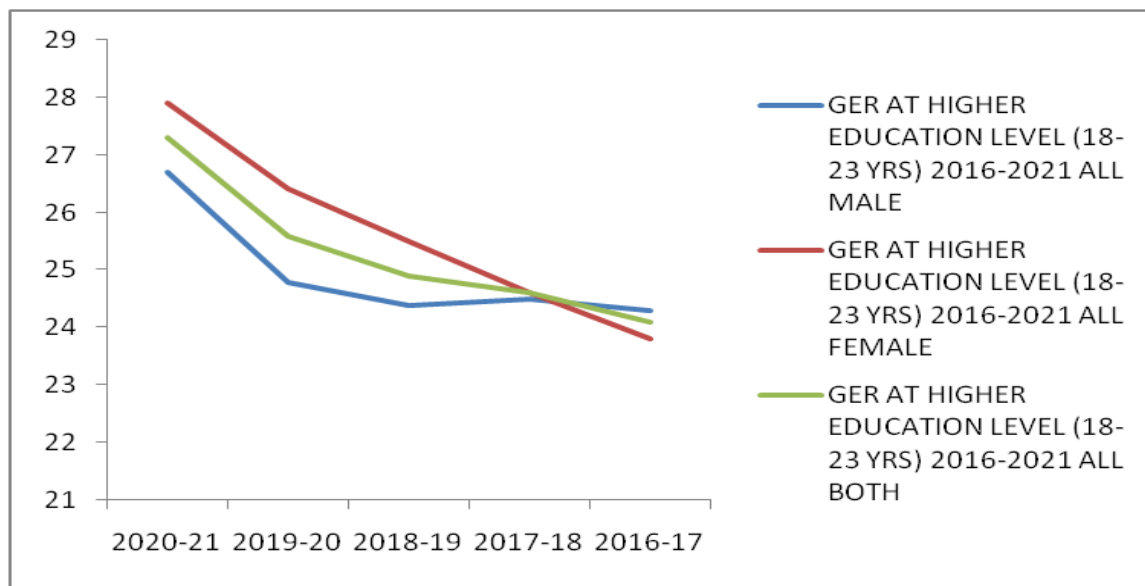
Bihar: With a GER of 18.8 percent overall in 2020–21, Bihar has a lower GER than the national average. GER has, nevertheless, been steadily rising over time for both males and females. Both the male and female SC and ST GERs are lower than the overall GER; nevertheless, there is a notable increase in the GER of the SC and ST females from 2016–17 to 2020–21.

Overall, the state-specific research reveals that while certain states, like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, have continuously maintained high GER values, other states, including Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, require development.



Source: UDISE+ 2019-20, Department of School Education & Literacy and AISHE 2019-20

HERE ARE A FEW IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT GER:



Source: Author’s own creation

- 1) Male and female GERs are trending upward, with the national GER for higher education rising from 24.1 percent in 2016–17 to 27.3 percent in 2020–21.
- 2) Kerala, with a GER of 46.5 percent, has the highest of all the states and union territories in 2020–21.
- 3) With a GER of 15.9 percent, Bihar had the lowest of all the states and union territories in 2020–21.
- 4) Tamil Nadu (42.5 percent), Chandigarh (44.5 percent), and Delhi (45.5 percent) are among the other states and union territories with high GER in 2020–21.
- 5) Jharkhand (19.6 percent), Assam (17.5 percent), and Uttar Pradesh (16.5 percent) are among the other states and union territories with low GER in 2020–21.

CHALLENGES IN INCREASING FEMALE GER:

Increasing the female gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education faces several challenges, many of which are deeply rooted in societal, cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Some of the key challenges include:

1. **Socio-cultural Norms:** Deep-seated socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes often prioritize male education over female education. Traditional roles assigned to women as caregivers and homemakers may discourage families from investing in their daughters' higher education.
2. **Economic Barriers:** Economic constraints, including poverty and limited financial resources, pose significant barriers to female education. Families may prioritize investing in sons' education over daughters', viewing it as a better return on investment.
3. **Accessibility and Infrastructure:** Limited access to educational institutions, especially in rural areas, and inadequate infrastructure such as schools and transportation facilities can hinder female enrolment in higher education. Distance to educational institutions and safety concerns may further deter girls from pursuing higher education.
4. **Early Marriage and Parenthood:** Early marriage and parenthood are prevalent in many communities, particularly in rural areas, leading to dropout rates among young girls. Balancing familial responsibilities with academic pursuits becomes challenging for young women, often resulting in discontinuation of education.
5. **Gender-based Violence and Harassment:** Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and discrimination, within educational institutions creates hostile environments that deter female students from pursuing higher education. Fear of harassment or violence may lead parents to restrict their daughters' mobility and educational opportunities.
6. **Policy Implementation Gaps:** While policies and initiatives aimed at promoting female education exist, gaps in implementation and enforcement often undermine their effectiveness. Limited awareness, bureaucratic hurdles, and corruption can impede the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.
7. **Quality of Education:** Disparities in the quality of education, including curriculum content, teaching methodologies, and learning resources, can disproportionately affect female students. Inadequate educational quality may discourage girls from pursuing higher education or limit their academic achievements.

8. **Cultural Attitudes Towards Women's Education:** Cultural attitudes that prioritize traditional gender roles and devalue women's education can perpetuate gender disparities in enrolment rates. Changing deeply ingrained cultural beliefs requires sustained efforts to promote the importance of educating girls and women.

Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted approaches involving policy interventions, community engagement, awareness campaigns, targeted scholarships and incentives, improvements in infrastructure and accessibility, as well as efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality at all levels of society.

REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND ITS ROLE IN INCREASING FEMALE GER:

Several government initiatives have been implemented to increase the female gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education. Here are some examples of policies:

1. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter):

Policy Description: Launched by the Government of India, this initiative aims to address gender imbalance and promote the education of girls. It includes various components such as financial support for girl child education, awareness campaigns to change societal attitudes, and incentives for families to prioritize girls' education.

Implication: Under this initiative, the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana was introduced, which encourages parents to save for the education and marriage expenses of their girl child through a small savings scheme with attractive interest rates and tax benefits.

2. Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA):

Policy Description: RUSA is a centrally sponsored scheme aimed at improving access, equity, and quality in higher education. It emphasizes the expansion of higher education institutions, infrastructure development, and enhancement of faculty resources.

Implication: RUSA provides funding support to states for the establishment of women's colleges and universities, which focus on promoting female education and addressing gender disparities in enrollment. These institutions offer specialized programs and support services tailored to the needs of female students.

3. National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE):

Policy Description: NSIGSE is a centrally sponsored scheme that provides financial incentives to encourage girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to continue their education beyond the secondary level. It aims to reduce the gender gap in secondary education and promote girls' enrollment in higher education.

Implication: Under NSIGSE, eligible girls receive cash incentives upon completing secondary education and enrolling in higher secondary schools or colleges. The scheme also includes provisions for scholarships and other support services to facilitate girls' transition to higher education.

4. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):

Policy Description: PMKVY is a flagship skill development program aimed at providing industry-relevant training to youth across India. It focuses on enhancing employability and entrepreneurship skills to enable individuals to secure gainful employment or start their own ventures.

Implication: PMKVY includes special provisions to promote skill development among women, including incentives for training providers to enroll and train female candidates. By offering skill-based education and vocational training, PMKVY empowers women to pursue higher education or enter the workforce with relevant skills.

5. Support for Statistical Strengthening (SSS):

Policy Description: The SSS scheme aims to strengthen statistical infrastructure and capacity-building efforts to improve data collection, analysis, and reporting in various sectors, including education.

Implication: SSS supports the collection and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data on enrollment rates, retention rates, and academic performance in higher education. By providing accurate and reliable data, SSS enables policymakers to identify gaps and monitor progress in increasing female GER.

These examples highlight the diverse range of government initiatives aimed at promoting female education and increasing the GER in higher education in India. Through targeted policies and programs, the government seeks to address gender disparities, empower women, and create an inclusive and equitable higher education system.

ROADMAP TO REVOLUTIONIZE FEMALE GER IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA :

1) Policy Reforms and Implementation:

The Government of India's National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes equitable access to education and aims to increase female GER in higher education by providing opportunities for all, regardless of gender. The policy advocates for gender-sensitive curriculum, inclusive classrooms, and measures to address socio-economic barriers to education.

2) Financial Support and Scholarships:

The "Pragati Scholarship Scheme" by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) provides financial assistance to female students pursuing technical education at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The scheme aims to empower women by supporting their higher education aspirations and reducing financial constraints.

3) Infrastructure Development:

The "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" initiative includes provisions for the construction of girls' hostels and residential facilities near educational institutions, especially in rural and remote areas. By improving infrastructure and ensuring safe accommodation, the initiative encourages more girls to pursue higher education without facing logistical challenges.

4) Digital Learning and Access to Resources:

The "SWAYAM" (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) platform provides free online courses and learning materials across various subjects and disciplines. By leveraging digital technology, SWAYAM enhances access to quality education for female students, especially those in remote areas with limited educational resources.

5) Community Engagement and Awareness:

The "Beti Zindabad" campaign in Rajasthan engages local communities through grassroots-level initiatives to promote girls' education and gender equality. Through awareness drives, parent-teacher meetings, and community dialogues, the campaign mobilizes support for female education and challenges harmful social norms.

6) Empowerment through Skill Development:

The "Saksham" scheme in Odisha provides vocational training and skill development opportunities to adolescent girls, equipping them with employable skills and empowering them to pursue higher education or gain economic independence. By offering practical training in trades such as tailoring, beauty care, and computer literacy, Saksham prepares girls for future employment opportunities.

7) Research and Data Monitoring:

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) conducted by Pratham Education Foundation provides valuable insights into the status of education, including gender disparities in enrollment and learning outcomes. By tracking progress and identifying challenges, ASER informs evidence-based policymaking and program implementation to improve female GER in higher education.

8) Promotion of Women's Leadership and Role Models:

The "Women Scientists Scheme" by the Department of Science and Technology supports women researchers and scientists through mentorship, training, and research grants. By showcasing successful women role models in science and technology fields, the scheme inspires young girls to pursue higher education and careers in STEM disciplines.

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