

Girls' Higher Education in the Era of Globalization: Issues of Access and Quality

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Abstract: *The focus of this paper is to examine the status of girls' higher education in the era of globalization. Education is reasonably a good indication of development and the right of every individual to education is one of the first provisions of UDHR. Higher education has gained significant priority in independent India since it was perceived as a promoter of economic growth, technological development and also as an instrument of equal opportunity and upward social mobility. The changes of economic liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation are impacting on the higher education system worldwide. Increasing cost of higher education, gender bias and discrimination lead to low enrolment of girls in higher education and the access to quality education is difficult for them. Majority of women are enrolled in traditional courses which make it difficult for them to meet the required demand for employment opportunities in the era of globalization.*

Key Words: *Globalization, Women and Higher education in India, Enrolment of Women in Various Disciplines, Issues of Access and Quality.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Access to education is a fundamental right of both women and men. Education promotes social mobility, equality and empowerment. According to Gandhi, a human being without education is not much different from an animal. Education is equally necessary for women as it is for men. Gandhi stressed the need for an education that would help women to think on their own. The right to free and compulsory primary education, without discrimination has been reaffirmed in all major international human rights conventions. Education is reasonably a good indication of development and the right of every individual to education is one of the first provisions of UDHR. Women in India constitute 50% of the country's human resources and their contributions are vital for the nation's progress. In spite of all these, women in India have not been able to take full advantage of their rights and opportunities for various reasons. Gandhi advocated education as one of the means to enable women to assert their rights and to achieve emancipation. According to the recent data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), drop-out rates remain high for girls as they struggle with gender disparities at every level of education.

Globalization can be defined as "a complex economic, political, cultural, and geographic process in which the mobility of capital, organizations, ideas, discourses, and peoples has taken a global or transnational form [1]. Globalization has resulted in significant changes in the knowledge economy and ushered new conditions for the provision of higher education to cater the skill requirement across the globe. The world has witnessed an enormous economic transformation over the past three decades, fostered by growing global flows of goods and services, technology, and information. The key elements of globalization include the knowledge society, information and communication technologies, the market economy, trade liberalization and changes in governance structures. These elements of globalization have impacted significantly the education sector in general and higher education in particular.

Higher education institutions have been both the agents and objects of globalization [2].

Objectives of the Paper

1. To examine the status of girls' higher education in the era of globalization with respect to access, quality and enrolment rates in various disciplines.
2. To identify how globalization and gender affect girls' higher education and career options

II. GLOBALIZATION, HIGHER EDUCATION AND GENDER

Globalization affects each country in a different way due to a nation's individual history, traditions, culture and priorities [3]. There are a number of factors such as the knowledge society, information and communication technologies, the market economy, trade liberalization and changes in governance structures that have significant impact on the education sector [4]. Globalization has changed the world into a global market and the direct nexus between the industry, corporate world and higher education has brought a transformation in the skills needed for jobs.

The implications of globalization on education systems includes the change in the stratification of disciplines/subjects between arts and science; the expansion of the applied/professional subjects and the private sector as a critical player and shifts in the subject choices of women. Moreover, globalization is increasingly focused on techno sciences which have gendered implications because women are less likely to be involved in those areas.

There are several dimensions of changes that have taken place since 1991, the most important of which is in the position of the government which is reflected in the reduction of state funding to higher education, entry of private players, the increase in the individual cost of higher education, influence of the so-called economic liberalization and

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the market demand on women's access to higher education and their choices of subjects. The growth of private education has contributed to the increasing undergraduate enrolment in higher education mainly in the application oriented science and professional subjects which are being offered in the colleges of arts and sciences. The impact of the various trends and challenges related to globalisation on higher education institutions and policies is profound, but also diverse, depending on the specific location in the global arena. The pressures for change emanating from globalization came when the higher education system was unable to meet the rising social demand for professional education. Therefore, globalization has meant privatization and increased individual cost of higher education. These are likely to provide positive and negative possibilities for women to access higher education [5]. Moreover, the new developments have led to the devaluation of disciplines which have been the choice of women. For example, women are generally located in the humanities and the social science subjects. There has been a corresponding change in the boundaries between arts and science subjects [6]. While women used to enter colleges and universities mainly in general education or in arts subjects till the early nineties, now they are entering the private self-financing institutions for pursuing their studies in both the new and the traditionally labeled 'masculine' disciplines [7].

Women and Higher Education

The Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world. It consists of colleges, universities and institutions of national importance (such as Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management and Indian Institutes of Science, etc.), and autonomous institutions with the status of deemed universities [8]. Women gained access to higher education during the first four decades after independence when higher education was fully state funded and highly subsidized. But girls' enrolment in higher education was not at satisfactory level due to lack of awareness of its importance, gender bias etc. today even if they enroll for higher education majority of them choose the discipline in which the cost of education is low.

Majority of people are living in rural areas, most of the parents are illiterate and ignorant about the importance of higher education which help their daughters to lead an independent life and safe guard them from the exploitation of men. The enrolment of girls' in professional/ technical education is very low because girls' do not prefer these courses. These courses are considered difficult for them as they do not have proper foundation of science subjects at their primary and secondary levels of education. Also when parents enroll their girls in higher education, they prefer to admit them in traditional courses because of the fear of cost of education. The sex role socialization and consequent stereotyping of the 'feminine' role have their impact upon the higher education of girls.

In its size and its diversity, India has the third largest higher education system in the world. The system is now more mass based and democratized with one third to 40% of enrolments coming from lower social strata, and women comprising of some 35% of the total enrolments [9]. Times of India reports that Goa's higher education institutions have a female

enrolment of 61.2%, making it the highest women enrolment for higher studies in any state in India. The findings published in the latest annual report of the UGC [10], shows that Goa has not just retained the top spot since 2006-07 but has bettered its past record. Kerala which found itself in the second spot in women's enrolment at 56.8%, was ousted by Goa from the top spot in 2006-07, when the state recorded female enrollment of 59%. The UGC report also noted that across the country the percentage increase in women enrolment has been almost minimal as compared to the total enrolment in all states during 2010-2011 over the preceding year.

Gender Bias against Girls' Higher Education

The gender bias in education is a critical issue for women throughout world and it lays an important role in the inferior position of women. It refers to the differential treatment of boys and girls in schools and unequal opportunities of education for girls and boys. Social prejudice, customs and norms also constrain access. The role expectations, related socialization norms, etc. determine whether girls should go for higher education, what type of education they receive, and for how long. In early days girl's education used to focus on developing skills which reinforced their socialized roles, while boys were prepared to become co-partners in administration activities and other development fields.

Parents' attitude is very important for the educational development of girls. The negative parental attitude towards the higher education of girls affected the enrolment and achievement of girls. In a recent study of Chugh [11] found that India's patriarchal society give less importance to girl's education due to the socio-cultural and economic barriers prevailing in the society even in 21st century. Abdusalam and Sarfunnisa [12] conducted a study on the attitude of parents towards higher education of girls in Malappuram District of Kerala state and the findings reveals that the parents have only 'moderate' attitude towards girl's higher education.

Globalisation has increased this bias against girls' higher education. The gender bias in school choice, course taking etc by parents is quite evident. Due to globalization the higher education has become highly expensive and increased the individual cost of higher education, hence parents are forced to a rethinking that should their investment be in the marriage or education of their daughters. The male dominated society priorities marriage and motherhood for girls' to their education and career development. Because of these, parents send their daughters to low fee structured government colleges while the sons are sending to high fee structured technical or professional colleges. Even today education of girls is perceived as wastage of money, as daughters get married and move to another family, and parents are not benefited from educating daughters. But education of boys is perceived as an investment. This in turn affects the participation of girls in higher education, especially their access to quality education unlike that of boys.

III. HIGHER EDUCATION: ISSUES OF ACCESS AND QUALITY

Higher education is of vital importance for the country as it is a powerful tool to build knowledge based society of

the 21st century. The present format of Higher education in India was started in 1857 with the inception of universities in the three presidency towns. At present, India possesses a highly developed higher education system which offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human's creative and intellectual endeavors such as arts and humanities, natural, mathematical and social sciences, engineering; medicine, dentistry, agriculture, education, law, commerce and management, music and performing arts, national and foreign languages, culture, communications etc [13].

Although Higher Education has expanded several times since independence, issues of access, equity, and quality still continue to be the areas of concern. The access of quality education for girls is still a difficult one. They cannot go forward in the higher education area like professional and technical education, still there is masculine dominance. Sexual harassment and abuse within educational institutions negatively impacts on girls' ability to access higher education.

Higher educational institutions are highly engaged in the private sector focused on market values and success rates and do not have a commitment to the constitutional values of equality and citizenship. Studies show that government educational systems are becoming the centres of poor quality education and girls are high in these sectors. Because of gender bias girls' cannot access quality higher education. The main reason for low enrolment rate is that higher education is comparatively expensive than secondary education and parents are unable to put their effort to enroll their daughters in higher education institutions which results in gender disparity in enrolment at higher education levels. Usha and Rao [14], in their paper on "Status of Women in Higher Education in India- Strategies for the improvement of Women's enrolment in Higher education", opine that majority of population live in rural areas and mainly depend on agriculture, there is no seriousness towards higher education as they are in belief that the priority of girls life is marriage rather than employment. Examining women's access to higher education, it discusses the impact of current socio-economic and political realities on women's participation in science education and research. Not only is there a disjuncture between professed policy statements and prevailing ground realities, certain assumptions about class, caste or gender operate here unquestioned [15].

Enrolment of Women in Various Disciplines

Women are enrolled lesser in mathematics, science and technical areas and more often for disciplines like languages, humanities and domestic sciences. Programmes like medicine, business and law have been dominated by men; whereas programmes leading to jobs like social work, teaching etc. are dominated by women. One of the main concerns has been the imbalance as seen in arts vis-a-vis science at the school level i.e. girls' enrolment in science subjects is much lower in comparison to boys. They tend to cluster in arts, humanities, social sciences. The argument is that girls tend to opt for specific subjects because of their socialization which relates feminine roles to feminine subjects [16].

UGC Report on Higher Education [17] revealed that most of the women are enrolled in Arts (51.7%) which is the traditional course. On the other hand their enrolment in engineering / technology and medicine were accounted for 3.75% and 3.50% respectively. The same trend was observed in subsequent years also. In 2009-10 women's enrolment in Arts courses is highest (49.08%) followed by science (19.9%), and commerce and management (16.21%).

The main reason for low levels of enrolment of women in professional courses is the highest cost of education which is beyond the means of women in a patriarchal society where the male preference plays a dominant role. As a result, they prefer traditional education rather than professional or technical education which has low employment potentialities. Thus there is no seriousness towards women's higher education as they are in the belief that marriage rather than employment should be prioritised in a girl's life [18].

Disciplinary Choice and Career Options

The economic liberalization and the market demands have influenced not only women's access to higher education but also choices of subjects. The programmes in higher education are divided into those of general subjects such as arts which include social sciences and humanities; and pure sciences, on the one hand, and the professional courses such as engineering (which includes architecture), medical science, teacher education, agriculture, law etc, on the other. According to Raheem [19] discipline boundaries not only limit choices, but also on the future options of life chances of women. They are also divided into masculine and feminine disciplines. For example, arts, social sciences, humanities and teacher education have been viewed as feminine disciplines. On the other hand, commerce, law, engineering are considered as masculine disciplines. Thus, the disciplinary choices of women have been the focus of debate in the feminist discourse on education and gender.

Social role expectations affect the aspirations of women in other ways too. For example, in the patriarchal social structure, parents are not expected to use the income of their daughters, there for, even educated daughters are not encouraged to work and if they do so, it is for short period before marriage. It's the right of the groom's family to decide whether she will work or not. Very often women are sending to arts and humanities because they are cheaper, softer and shorter than the professional courses [20].

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Education is the primary and powerful tool for a person to develop ability and perform all duties given by the family, society and even the nation. The education of women especially in the higher stages will make available to the country a wealth of capacity. Well educated and qualified women are not only the social assets but they contribute towards human development. The National Policy on Education has envisaged easy and equal access to education to women and girls, in higher education in general and technical education particular, steps are taken to facilitate inter-regional mobility by providing equal access to very median of requisite merit, regardless of origin.

Globalization increased the cost of higher education, social and economic reasons and increased gender bias in girls' education making the access and quality of higher education for girls a serious issue. At present girls' higher education is viewed as a symbol of social status and is linked to their marriage prospects, for getting good husbands, not linked with their career development. According to Gandhi, education for women was the need of the time that would ensure their moral development and make them capable of occupying same platform as that of men. Gandhi believed education to be the most potent instrument for the regeneration of women. Women's education is essential for happy and healthy family, improvement of society, economic prosperity and national solidarity. So it is necessary to develop proper awareness among parents about the need for encouraging girls to get higher education. The government must have a vision that encompasses the governance of the public and private sectors and keep in focus the gender concerns.

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