

## A STUDY ON GENDER INEQUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study considers the gender inequality that exists among every region, social class and prevents the growth of Indian education systems. The reality of gender inequality of higher education in India is very complex and diversified, because it exists in every field like education, employment opportunities, income, health, cultural issues, social issues, economic issues etc. An attempt has been made to find out those factors which are responsible for this problem in Indian education systems. So, this paper highlights the multi-dimensional context of gender inequalities prevalent in Indian education systems. Overall, the study indicates the inequality in economic, social, cultural and legal biasness which are of a great challenge for policy-makers and social scientists to establish proper equality in the entire social field. The researchers have tried to suggest some relevant strategies and policies implication for reducing this gender inequality and to promote the dignified position for Indian women.*

**Keyword:** Higher education, Gender, cast, religion inequality,

### INTRODUCTION:

Gender inequality in India refers to health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in India. Various international gender inequality indices rank India differently on each of these factors, as well as on a composite basis, and these indices are controversial. Gender inequalities, and its social causes, impact India's sex ratio, women's health over their lifetimes, their educational attainment, and economic conditions. Gender inequality in India is a multifaceted issue that concerns men and women alike. Some argue that some gender equality measures, place men at a disadvantage. However, when India's population is examined as a whole, women are at a disadvantage in several important ways.

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## GENDER INEQUALITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Probably the most important problem faced by the higher education system in India is the persistence of inequalities in access to higher education. Inequalities in access to higher education result in socio-economic inequalities in the society which, in turn, accentuate inequalities in education. In fact, it is a cyclic chain of Inequalities: inequalities in access to higher education result in inequities in access to labor market information, which result in inequalities in employment and participation in labor market, resulting in inequalities in earnings contributing in turn to socio-economic and political inequalities. The socio-economic and political inequalities again are translated into the education sector, resulting in inequalities in education. Inequalities in access to education reflect loss in individual as well as social welfare. That economic returns to investment in education of the weaker sections are estimated to be higher than returns to their counterparts, implies that inequalities in education would cause huge losses in national output; and that inclusive strategies that contribute to equity should be viewed favorably not only from the point of view of social justice but also even in terms of economic well-being, as the total equity gains might surpass the losses in efficiency, if any (Patnaik, 2012). One of the most important dimensions of inequality is between men and women. Women are generally found to be lagging behind men in every sector including higher education in India as in many countries, though reverse trends could be observed of late in a good number of countries. During the post-independence period, there is a significant improvement in women's participation in higher education. Women constitute 43 per cent of the total enrolments in higher education in 2011–12, while there were only 14 women per 100 men in higher education in 1950–51, according to the available UGC statistics (UGC, 2013). Thus, compared to the earlier decades, this marks a significant improvement. While this 43 per cent is an all-India average across all disciplines of study, there are wide variations between different states and also across disciplines. Women students constitute 11 per cent in engineering/technology, 4 per cent in medicine and less than 5 per cent in education. Nevertheless, the overall level of participation of women in higher education has improved remarkably and the current overall level is quite impressive. Further, research studies (for example, Basant and Sen 2012) have also shown that 'after controlling for other factors, the chances of women participating in higher education are higher than that of men' meaning the generally observed inequalities by gender in higher education need to be interpreted with caution. The gross enrolment ratio among men increased from 10.9 per cent in 1983–84 to 27 per cent in 2009–10—it increased by 2.5 times in about two decades and a half. In contrast, only 19 per cent of the women in the relevant age group were enrolled in higher education in 2009–10. But what is strikingly clear is: there has a rapid progress in the enrolment ratio

among women compared to men. The gross enrolment ratio for women increased by more than four times. As a result, gender inequalities in gross enrolment ratio have come down very significantly during this period.

The available estimates on net enrolment ratios, however, indicate that between 1999–2000 and 2004–05, the increase in enrolment ratios is very small in case of both men and women; hardly it increased by 2 per cent points in either case, and the level of inequality remained the same. The male–female differences are much less in case of eligible enrolment ratios. While 49 per cent of eligible girls join higher education institutions, the corresponding ratio is marginally higher for men, 56 per cent, a difference of about 7 per cent points.

### **INEQUALITIES BY SOCIAL GROUPS**

It is widely recognized that inequalities across social groups are multi-dimensional and difficult to capture empirically. Inequality by caste is a major phenomenon in India, and is also subject to extensive rigorous research, policy making and policy analysis. Caste is considered as one of the most important determinants of perceived social status in India (Bros 2014), and is ‘too strong to be suppressed permanently’ (Deshpande, 2012). SCs and STs are traditionally regarded as the most backward sections of the Indian society. They were also subject to discrimination in social, political and economic spheres for a long time and to correct some of these historical disadvantages, reservations are provided to them in education and employment. Some more castes are recognized as ‘other backward castes’. Following the Mandal Commission Report (Government of India, 1980), adopted by the Government of India, reservation policy was extended to a few ‘other’ backward castes. Some of the minority religious groups, like the Muslims, have been lagging far behind others in education development. The report of the Sachar Committee (Government of India, 2006) has highlighted this in the recent years. This has also become an important issue of research, and also an important policy issue (Hasan, 2012). It is often quoted that SCs constitute only 12 per cent of the total enrolments in higher education and STs 4.5 per cent (2011–12); or Muslims constitute such a small proportion. But a more meaningful analysis can be based on enrolment ratios and the rates of higher education attainment.

### **INEQUALITIES BY CASTE**

The enrolment ratios of SCs and STs have been consistently very much below those of non-scheduled population or the total population on average. But both SCs and STs have made significant advancement by increasing the enrolment ratios of the respective population groups by four to five times in about two decades and a half between 1983–84 and 2009–10. The growth was relatively faster in case of ST,

though in absolute terms their enrolment ratio is less than that of the SC; and as a result, the differences between SC and ST have come down; and also the differences between the scheduled population and non-scheduled population declined. However, it must be added that: (a) the enrolment ratios among both the SC and ST are low and (b) still significant inequalities persist between scheduled and non-scheduled population groups. The enrolment ratio in 2009–10 was nearly 12 per cent among the ST and 15 per cent among the SC compared to 23 per cent for all (Table 4). Quite interestingly, there is not much variation in the eligible enrolment ratio between several caste groups. While it ranges between 50 per cent and 54 per cent for SC, for OBCs and others (non-backward sections), the ratio is much higher, 62 per cent in case of STs. Between various caste groups the transition rate ranges between 14 per cent (for ST) and 22 per cent (SC). SCs are ahead of all others.

As the rates of higher education attainment are only a stock indicator of the progress made over the years, these also show a high degree of inequality but rapid progress at the same time. Less than 3 per cent of the STs and just 4 per cent among the SCs had completed levels of higher education in 2009–10. These figures in 2009–10 mark five times and 6.5 times increase between 1983–84

### **INEQUALITIES BETWEEN RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

Inequalities in gross enrolment ratio between various religious groups are much higher. Estimates on gross enrolment ratio are available for Hindus, Muslims, Christians and 'others'. Enrolment ratio among Muslims was only 14 per cent in 2009–10, while it was 24.2 per cent among Hindus and 37 per cent among Christians. The enrolment ratio among 'Others' that includes Jains, Sikhs, etc., is also high—28 per cent in 2009–10. The enrolment ratio is the highest among the Christians and the least among the Muslims (Table 6). This is the same situation consistently throughout the period between 1983–84 and 2009–10.

While there has been improvement in case of all the four groups between 1983–84 and 2009–10, the inter-group inequalities by religion did not decline much. In fact, the gap seemed to have widened (Figure 5). According to the estimates by Azam and Blom (2009), one does not find much inequality between Hindus and Muslims, with the transition ratio being around 70 per cent in 2004–05. Christians are, of course, far ahead with a ratio of about 80 per cent. Among both Hindus and Muslims, out of every 100 secondary school graduates, 71 per cent go for higher education. The ratio was 80 per cent among Christians. But overall refined estimates of transition rates in 2009–10 are very low—about 20 per cent among Hindus and Christians, 16 per cent among Muslims and 11 per cent among others.

## RURAL–URBAN DISPARITIES

Now, we will discuss spatial inequalities. There are wide inequalities between different states in India in higher education in terms of number of universities and colleges, infrastructure in those institutions, student enrolment and even public expenditure. The gross enrolment ratio in higher education varies among the major states between less than or around 10 per cent in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh on the one side and above or around 40 per cent in Chandigarh and Tamil Nadu on the other side (MHRD, 2014).

## INEQUALITIES BY ECONOMIC CLASSES

Estimates of various indicators of higher education development (and other indicators) based on the NSS data are available by household expenditure quintiles/deciles. A few scholars have used alternative indicators like assets (or asset index) to consider the economic levels of the households but the monthly per capita expenditure, on which NSS provides rich data.

## CONCLUSION:

In this study an attempt has been made to find out those factors which are affected gender inequality for problem in higher education of India. This paper revealed the multi-dimensional area of gender inequalities prevalent in Indian Educational Institutions. This study indicates the inequality in economic, social, cultural, moral, ethical and legal biasness which are of a great challenge for policy-makers and social scientists to establish proper equality in the entire social field. The researchers, policy makers and educationist a have tried to recommended some relevant strategies and policies implication for reducing this gender inequality and to promote the dignified position for Indian women.

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