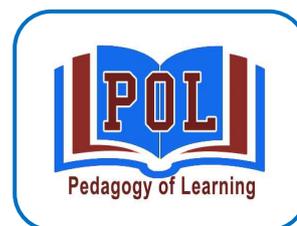


**Pedagogy of Learning**, Volume-1, Issue-1, pp.53-62, Jan 2015  
(International Journal of Education)  
**ISSN: 2320-9526 (Print)**  
**ISSN: 2395-7344 (Online)**  
Website: [www.pedagogyoflearning.com](http://www.pedagogyoflearning.com)



#### **Recommended Citation:**

Kaur, R. (2015). Women participation in higher education in India: locating the multiple layers of disparity. *Pedagogy of Learning, Vol.1* (1), pp.53-62 (Online)

## **Women Participation in Higher Education in India: Locating the Multiple Layers of Disparity**

**Rakshinder Kaur**

Assistant Professor, Department of Education,  
Punjabi University Regional Centre, Bathinda (Punjab), India  
E-mail: [rakshinderedu@gmail.com](mailto:rakshinderedu@gmail.com)

Article Received : 11-10-2014

Article Revised : 14-12-2014

Article Accepted : 27-12-2014

**Abstract:** *The concerted efforts are being made throughout the world for improving the participation rate in higher education by ensuring participation of students from the disadvantaged sections of the society. In India too, serious efforts in this direction have been made in the recent years. In order to ascertain that how far these efforts have been fructified an analysis of the secondary data pertaining to different dimensions of higher education participation of women in India has been carried out. The general trend that emerged is that despite the fact that demographically the number of men and women are nearly the same in India, the gender disparities in higher education participation are quite apparent. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education for males and females residing in rural and urban areas highlights wide rural-urban disparity. The analysis of data regarding the participation of women of different social categories in higher education illustrated that the enrolment ratio of marginalised social categories like SCs, STs and OBCs in higher education is significantly lower than that of the General category indicating that gender does not work alone outside the interlocking effects of other structures of discrimination and exclusion.*

**Keywords:** *Participation in Higher Education, Gross Enrolment Ratio, Exclusion.*

### **Introduction**

Education plays a very important role in the development of a nation. Investment in education becomes an important agenda throughout the world after Theodore W. Schultz gave a theory of Investment in Human Capital in 1961 in which he very well recognized the role of human capital in achieving the high economic growth in a country. In fact all the stages of education has their own importance but in the last decades or so now it is well established that higher education contributes not only to national development through

dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills but also brings about attitudinal changes for modernization and social transformation leading to formation of strong nation state and promotion of higher quality of individual and social life. Knowledge-based competition within a globalizing economy is prompting a fresh consideration of the role of higher education in development and growth. It is now been regarded as an engine of development in the new knowledge economy. Therefore, the world over, lot of efforts are being made in order to increase the participation rate in higher education and India is not an exception.

### **Higher Education Participation in India**

Access to higher education is an important issue and it has two dimensions: increasing participation and widening participation. Increasing participation refers to numerical increment in terms of the number of persons within the higher education age bracket registered at tertiary institutions, irrespective of the composition of participants. It implies that tertiary education has to be designed in such a way that it becomes possible for ever larger numbers of individuals within the age group to enroll. However, it is possible that increased participation only benefits some sections of the society or that the majority of the beneficiaries come from the traditionally more represented sections. It is also possible that the number of individuals who have hitherto been underrepresented in higher education would increase, yet this is not implicit.

India being a complex and most iniquitous society, barriers to higher education participation are also multifarious and intermingled with one another. There are several social, economic and political reasons which act as constraints to access and equity in higher education in India. Various aspects of inequities in India in the attainment of education equity are: inequity between male and female, inequity between rural and urban, inequity between Scheduled Caste (SC) and non-Scheduled Caste population, inequity between Scheduled Tribes (ST) and non-Scheduled Tribe population etc. Viewing these inequities prevailing in the society various policy initiatives has been put forward by the Government of India to make the higher education accessible to all the sections of the society.

One of the most important parameters of the size of the Indian higher education system is reflected in the number of the students participating in the institutions of higher learning. The number of students enrolled in the universities and colleges increased manifold since independence. At the time of independence, there were 20 universities and about 500 colleges with an enrolment of less than 150,000. In the subsequent years, there has been a steady increase in the number of students entering into the higher education. In 1970-71, there were 2 million students enrolled in higher education institutions. This number increased to 2.8 millions in 1980-81 and to 4.9 millions in 1990-1991. Further in 2000-2001 the student enrolment was 8.4 million which increased to 16.6 millions in 2006-2007 (FICCI, 2012:8). In the subsequent years, there has been a rapid growth in the number of students enrolling in higher education institutions and according to the Twelfth Five Year Plan document, the total student enrolment in higher education in the year 2011-12 was 217.86 lakhs (GOI,2013a:93).

**Table 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education in India (Various Years)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Gross Enrolment Ratio</b>
1950-1951	0.40%
1979-1980	5.0%
1989-1990	6.0%
1999-2000	10.0%
2005-2006	11.61%
2006-2007	12.39%
2007-2008	13.1%
2008-2009	13.7%
2009-2010	15.0%
2010-2011	17.2%
2011-2012	17.9%*
2011-2012	18.8%**
2012-2013	19.4%

*Source: UGC (2011), FICCI (2012), \*GOI (2013a), \*\*GOI (2013b) GOI (2013c) and GOI (2013d).*

When data on Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education in India through various years was analyzed, it was observed that in 1950-1951 GER of the country was only 0.40 per cent. This GER in higher education registered a gradual increase in subsequent years and reached the level of 5 per cent in 1979-1980 and then that of 6 per cent in 1989-1990 (Table-1). However, in the next decade a somewhat rapid increase in GER was witnessed and it reached the level of 10 per cent in 1999-2000. At the culmination of the next decade, India moved from an elite system of higher education to a mass system when the GER crossed the threshold of 15 per cent (GOI, 2013b:13) in 2009-2010. In the following years, the GER in higher education has registered a steep increase thus reaching at the level of 17.2 per cent in 2010-11 and to that of 17.9 per cent in 2011-12. However, as per the estimates of Government of India document on Rashtriya Uchattar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) the GER in higher education in the year 2011-12 was 18.8 per cent. The recent report of All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) has placed the GER figure at 19.4 (Table1). The Government of India has set the target of increasing the GER to 30 per cent by 2020 (GOI, 2013d:58).

### **Participation of Women in Higher Education**

There had been a phenomenal growth in the number of women students enrolled in higher education, since independence. The women enrolment which was less than 10 percent of the total enrolment on the eve of independence had risen to 41.6 percent in the academic year 2009-2010 and to 42.66 percent in the academic year 2011-2012 (UGC, 2012: 63). But despite the fact that demographically the number of men and women are nearly the same in India, the gender disparities in higher education participation are still apparent.

### **Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education (Gender-wise)**

In the age group of 18-23 years, females are way behind the males (and also behind the national average), when their Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education is considered. In 2011, the GER in higher education of the males was 19 per cent, whereas it was 15.2 per cent

for the females (Table 2). Further, the GER in higher education for females was also below the national average GER which was 17.2 percent in 2011.

**Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education (Gender-wise)**

Gender	2011	2013
Male	19.0	20.8
Female	15.2	17.9
All	17.2	19.4

**Source:** UGC (2011) and GOI (2013c).

The GER for the males is 20.8 per cent, while that for the females it is 17.9 per cent (Table 2). The GER in higher education figure for females still remains below the national average GER of 19.4 per cent. This analysis reveals that although due to accelerated growth rate in women's enrolment, the gap in higher education participation between men and women is narrowing but still in absolute terms women continue to lag behind men.

### **Location-Wise Women Participation in Higher Education**

Location in terms of rural or urban residence is also being viewed as one of the significant factors underlying the inequitable participation in higher education. Urban areas constitute comparatively privileged location as far as the availability of higher educational facilities and opportunities are concerned. As a result, people who reside in urban areas are undoubtedly better placed than their rural counterparts in participating in higher education. When the data pertaining to higher education participation in rural and urban areas was analysed vis-à-vis higher education participation of males and females from rural and urban areas it highlighted a wide rural-urban disparity. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education for rural males is only 13.7 per cent, whereas it is 29.6 per cent for urban males, which is more than double of the GER figure of the rural males (Table 3).

**Table 3: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education by Gender and Location**

Location	Males	Females	All
Rural	13.7	8.3	11.1
Urban	29.6	30.5	30.0
All	19.0	15.2	17.2

*Source: GOI (2013a)*

Further rural-urban divide for females is much wider with urban females exhibiting a GER of 30.5 per cent, while for the rural females it is merely 8.3 per cent (Table 3). The gender disparity vis-à-vis GER in higher education in urban areas is negligible and interestingly the urban female has higher GER (30.5%) than the urban males (29.6%). On the other hand the rural females with a GER of 8.3 per cent lag far behind their male counterparts in rural areas with a GER of 13.7 per cent (Table 3). Thus, the rural locale is deterring the higher education participation of females.

### **Stage-Wise Participation of Women in Higher Education**

The analysis of data pertaining to stage-wise students' participation in higher education reveals that at all the stages of higher education males outnumbered the females in enrolment. The male students at graduate level constitute 57.5 percent while enrolment of females is

only 42.5 percent. Similarly, only 44.5 percent of females are enrolled in postgraduate courses and their enrolment number in diploma/certificate courses is also 42.75 percent which is less than the male enrolment. Further, in the research, the proportion of women is far less than the males i.e. 37.75 percent, while for the males the figure is 62.25 percent (Table 4).

**Table 4: Stage-wise Enrolment in Higher Education (On Gender Basis)**

	<b>Number of Graduates</b>	<b>Number of Post-graduates</b>	<b>Number of Students in Research</b>	<b>Number of Students in Diploma/ Certificate Courses</b>
Male Students	10048000 (57.5%)	1382000 (55.5%)	94000 (62.25%)	111000 (57.25%)
Female Students	7407000 (42.5%)	1110000 (44.5%)	57000 (37.75%)	83000 (42.75%)
Total Students	17455000	2492000	151000	194000

*Source: UGC (2013)*

### **Faculty-wise Women Participation in Higher Education**

The relationship between availability of disciplinary choices and women’s ability to access them are not directly related nor are they dependent on women’s academic achievement. In India, girl’s academic performance is generally better or at par with the boys when they finish school. At least, this is true of those who are at the top. Every year newspaper headlines highlight the better performance of girls at the school board examinations in different provinces. Yet when they join college, it is not necessarily the subject of their choice (Chanana, 2007: 592). The most preferred discipline of the females by choice or the discipline in which fee structure is not too much is arts and most of females are in this discipline.

In order to get a better understanding of the participation of women in higher education, the data pertaining to faculty-wise women participation was analyzed. The analysis highlights that maximum number of the women in higher education i.e. 36.3 lakhs constituting 41.91 per cent of the total women enrolment are enrolled in the faculty of Arts. Further, the faculty of science has 19.17 per cent of women enrolment, followed by faculty of Commerce/Management with nearly 16.31 per cent of enrolment (Table 5).

**Table 5: Women Participation in Higher Education (Faculty-wise)**

<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Women Enrolment</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Women Enrolment</b>
Arts	3634876	41.91
Science	1662128	19.17
Commerce/Management	1414804	16.31
Education	428660	4.94
Engineering / Technology	959105	11.06
Medicine	350301	4.04
Agriculture	24808	0.29
Veterinary Science	6979	0.08
Law	107825	1.24

Others	82945	0.96
Total	8672431	100.00

*Source: UGC (2012)*

Thus, these three faculties constitute 77.39 per cent women enrolment. It is quite evident from the analysis that there is very less enrolment of the women in professional faculties as their enrolments in these faculties collectively constitute approximately 23 per cent of the total higher education enrolment of women. However, amongst the professional faculties the faculty of engineering and technology with an enrolment of 9.59 lakhs women represents nearly 11 per cent of the total women enrolment in higher education. The women enrolment in the faculties of Agriculture, Veterinary Science and Law is very minuscule i.e. 0.29, 0.08 and 1.24 per cent respectively (Table 5).

### **Programme-wise Women Participation in Higher Education**

Further in order to look into the patterns of participation of male and female students in higher education and also to ascertain that how equitable is the higher education participation in terms of gender, the data pertaining to programme-wise participation in higher education was also analyzed. The analysis reveals that from amongst the undergraduate courses it is only the B.A. programme in which there is somewhat equitable participation of male and female students. In this programme, there are 28.2 lakhs female students against 28.9 lakhs of male students thus respectively constituting 49 per cent and 51 per cent of the total higher education enrolment (Table 6).

When data for various postgraduate programmes were analysed, nearly the same trends in male and female student enrolments were witnessed. The enrolment figures in M.A., M.Sc. and M.Com for male students are respectively 47 per cent, 50 per cent and 49 per cent, whereas the corresponding figures for female students are 53 per cent, 50 per cent and 51 per cent respectively. This analysis indicates that women tend to be clustered in the general disciplines of Arts, Commerce and Sciences whereas men’s participation is characterized by both clustering in Arts and Science disciplines but also significantly dispersal in other programmes such as commerce, engineering and technology, law, computers etc.

**Table 6: Gender-based Participation in Higher Education (Programme-wise)**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Total number of enrolled students</b>	<b>Percentage of Male students</b>	<b>Percentage of Female students</b>
B.A.	5711975	2891726 (51%)	2820249 (49%)
B.Com	1837504	1071075 (58 %)	766429 (42%)
B.Sc.	1741576	944525 (54 %)	797051 (46%)
B.E.	869761	614766 (71%)	254995 (29 %)
BCA	375281	262463 (70%)	112818 (30 %)
B.Tech.	1452239	1027523 (71 %)	424716 (29 %)
LLB	118792	82827 (70%)	35965 (30 %)
MBBS	89,463	54414 (61%)	35049 (39 %)
M.A.	900148	423316 (47 %)	476832 (53%)
M.Com	165198	80585 (49%)	84613 (51%)
M.Sc.	362145	181738 (50 %)	180407 (50%)
MBA	562133	410485 (73 %)	151648 (27%)

MCA	227508	150707 (66%)	76801 (34%)
M.Tech	88064	62224 (71%)	25840 (29%)

Source: GOI (2013c).

### **Social Category-wise Women Participation in Higher Education**

Equitable access to quality higher education is an essential prerequisite for realizing the constitutional promise of ‘*Equality of Opportunity*’ as well as achieving the goal of inclusive development. But, it is a well established fact now that participation of various social categories in higher education is not equitable and balanced. The social category based on caste in Indian society exhibits a significant factor which plays a decisive role in accessibility to higher education. Some categories are both socially as well as educationally marginalized in our Indian society. The children belonging to these socially marginalized sections of the society could not get into higher education and even they could not avail the opportunities made available to them through some affirmative action. In fact, many of the imbalances occur at the school level due to low enrolments and high dropouts amongst the deprived, under privileged and marginalized sections. Thus, only a limited pool of such students is available for entry into higher education. As a result, a large proportion of seats in higher education reserved for SC, ST, OBC and persons with disabilities remain unfilled (GOI, 2013c: 102).

The data on participation of women belonging to various social categories in different higher education programmes were analyzed in order to have further insights in the patterns of higher education participation of different social categories. The analysis of the data highlights that among the undergraduate courses of Arts, Sciences and Commerce; it is Bachelor of Arts Programme, where there is maximum participation of women from the marginalized sections of society. The female students belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) have 12 per cent share in the total enrolment of this programme, whereas, the students belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other Backward Classes (OBC) have an enrolment of 6 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. Further in the B.Com programme, the SC, ST and OBCs students constitute 8 per cent, 2 per cent and 27 per cent of the total enrolment in this programme respectively, whereas general category students forms the rest 63 per cent of the enrolment (Table-7). In the B.Sc course, OBC students’ have better representation with 32.5 per cent of the total enrolment. The corresponding figures for SC and ST students are 10 per cent and 4 per cent respectively and for General category students corresponding figure is 53.5 per cent (Table-7). Thus, in both SC and ST social categories, females are less represented in higher education and are probably facing further deprivation within deprivation.

Further, the percentage enrolment of SC and ST women students in professional courses is very low as compared to General Category students. However, there is considerable representation of students belonging to OBCs in the professional courses as well. In the BCA course, the enrolment share of General Category, SC, ST and OBC students is 66.8 per cent, 6.5 per cent, 1.6 per cent and 25 per cent respectively.

**Table 7: Gender-based Participation in Higher Education (Social Category-wise)**

Programme	Female Students	Female Students Belonging to General Category	Female Students Belonging to SCs	Female Students Belonging to STs	Female Students Belonging to OBCs
B.A.	2820249	1524161 (54%)	334390(12%)	177624(6.0%)	784074(28%)
BCA	112818	75321 (66.8%)	7359(6.5%)	1905(1.6%)	28233(25.0%)
B.Com	766429	481299(63%)	63465(8.0%)	16975(2%)	204690(27%)
B.E.	254995	132072(52%)	20940(8%)	4443(1.75%)	97540(38.25%)
B.Sc.	797051	425577(53.5%)	81521(10%)	30284(4%)	259669(32.5%)
B.Tech	424716	255403(60%)	34896(8%)	11017(3%)	123400(29%)
LLB	35965	23355(65%)	4075(11%)	1255(3%)	7280(20%)
M.A.	476832	285070(60%)	55987(12%)	22978(5%)	112797(24%)
MBA	151648	104278(69%)	10254(6.5%)	2381(1.5%)	34735(23%)
MBBS	35049	25631(73%)	2284(6.5%)	1400(4%)	5734(16.5%)
MCA	76801	51575(67%)	4193(5.45%)	732(1%)	20301(26.55%)
M.Com	84613	54742(65%)	7593(9%)	2066(2%)	20212(24%)
M.Sc.	180407	106450(59%)	17239(9.5%)	4942(2.5%)	51776(29%)
M.Tech	25840	17043(66%)	2152(8%)	694(3%)	5951(23%)

Source: GOI (2013c)

Similarly, in the B.E. programme, the enrolment figure for SC, ST, OBC and General category is 8 per cent, 1.75 per cent, 38 per cent and 52 per cent respectively whereas in B.Tech the corresponding figures are 8 per cent, 3 per cent, 29 per cent and 60 per cent respectively showing only slight change in the participation figures for SC and ST students in these two professional courses. In the LLB programme, participation of SC students is of the level of 11 per cent while for ST students the figure is only 3 per cent. For OBC and General Category students, the enrolment percentage is 20 and 65 per cent respectively. There is a high representation of General Category in MBBS programme which is 73 per cent, whereas for SC, ST and OBC the figures are 6.5, 4 and 16.5 per cent respectively reflecting very less participation of these social categories in this course (Table 7).

Further, when the data for postgraduate programme-wise enrolment vis-à-vis social category was analyzed, nearly the same trend in enrolment was witnessed, where percentage enrolment of the students from the marginalized social categories was less than those from the general category. In general postgraduate courses such as M.A., M.Sc., and M.Com the enrolment figures for SC students are 12 per cent, 9.5 per cent and again 9 per cent, whereas the corresponding figures for ST students are 5 per cent, 2.5 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. The proportion of OBC students is better as compared to SCs and STs and their enrolment figures for the same courses are 24 per cent, 29 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. The percentage enrolment of general category students is 60 per cent, 59 percent and 65 percent respectively in all the three courses (Table 7).

In the post-graduate professional programmes the percentage enrolment of SCs and STs is very small, while the representation of general category students is disproportionately higher. In the M.B.A. course, there are 69 per cent students belonging to general category, 23 per

cent belonging to OBCs, only 6.5 per cent belonging to SCs and a minuscule 1.5 per cent belonging to STs (Table 7). In the M.C.A. course, the students belonging to general, SC, ST and OBC categories has an enrolment of 67 per cent, 5.45 per cent, 1 per cent and 26.55 per cent respectively. The corresponding figures for the M.Tech course are 66 per cent, 8 per cent, 3 per cent and 23 per cent respectively (Table 7).

### **Conclusion**

There had been phenomenal growth in the number of women students enrolled in higher education in India since independence. The women enrolment which was less than ten per cent of the total enrolment on the eve of independence had risen to 42.66 per cent in the academic year 2011-2012. But this figure is elusive because women as a gender in India is a complex entity divided by caste, class, tribe, region and religion. So, in case of women caste, class, religion, locale and also the nature of disciplines provide cumulative disadvantages and women are facing multiple burdens of inequalities and discrimination right from their birth. A quality education and that too at tertiary stage mean a lot for women and particularly for the women belonging to marginalized sections of the society.

Thus, with regard to the higher education participation of the females, the general trend that emerged is that despite the fact that demographically the number of men and women are nearly the same in India, the gender disparities in higher education participation are quite apparent. The Gross Enrolment Ratio of females is way behind than the males (and also behind the national average). The Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education for males and females residing in rural and urban areas highlights wide rural-urban disparity. Rural females as well as rural males were found to be far behind than their urban counterparts as far as GER in higher education is concerned indicating that the rural locale is deterring the higher education participation of both males and females. Further analysis indicates that women tend to be clustered in the general disciplines of Arts, Commerce and Sciences whereas men's participation is characterized not only by clustering in Arts and Science disciplines but also significantly by dispersal in other programmes such as commerce, engineering and technology, law, computers etc.

The analysis of data regarding the participation of different social categories in higher education illustrates that the enrolment ratio of marginalized social categories like SCs, STs and OBCs in higher education is significantly lower than that of the General category. Further it is Bachelor of Arts Programme, where there is maximum participation of marginalized sections of society. Moreover, the enrolment of both SCs and STs in professional courses is very low. OBCs' enrolment rate is far better than SCs and STs and their representation in professional courses is also better but the females belonging to general category dominate the enrolment figures in both general and professional courses indicating that gender does not work alone outside the interlocking effects of other structures of discrimination and exclusion.

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