

Gender equality and women empowerment in India

*¹ Vimal Vidushy, ² Gagandeep Sethi

¹ Officiating Principal, A.S. College of Education, Khanna, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

² Assistant Professor, A.S. College, Khanna, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

Abstract

Gender equality and women's empowerment are human rights that lie at the heart of development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Despite the progress that has been made, six out of ten of world's poorest people are still women and girls, less than 16 percent of the world's parliamentarians are women, two thirds of all children shut outside the school gates are girls and, both in times of armed conflict and behind closed doors at home, women are still systematically subjected to violence. Gender equality will be achieved only when women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. This means sharing equally, power and influence, and having equal opportunities in economic and social spheres. Empowered women make invaluable contribution to the improvement of health conditions and educational status and productivity of whole families and communities, which in turn improve prospects for the next generation. The Millennium Development Goal also puts emphasis on gender equality and empowerment of women. It is now widely accepted that gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental cornerstones for achieving development results.

Keywords: gender equality, women empowerment, higher education, gender parity

1. Introduction

Gender equality will be achieved only when women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. This means sharing equally, power and influence, and having equal opportunities in economic and social spheres. Equal claim on education and career prospects will enable women to realize their personal ambitions. Gender equality demands the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. When women are empowered, the whole family benefit, thus benefiting the society as a whole and these benefits often have a ripple effect on future generations.

1.1 Gender equality

The gender equality means that both men and women, as human being, have equal rights and opportunities irrespective of gender. It also refers that all people (men and women) must have equal right to develop their personal abilities and free to make personal choices. State or society will not discriminate between men and women on the basis of gender. Moreover, gender equality emphasis that natural or biological difference between men and women will not lead to difference in status and rights in all sphere of life between men and women ([www. http://global.finland.fi](http://global.finland.fi)). According to World Bank (2012) ^[12], "Gender refers to the social, behavioral, and cultural attributes, expectations and norms that distinguish men and women. Gender equality refers to the extent to which men's and women's opportunities and outcomes are constrained—or enhanced—solely on the basis of their gender".

1.2 Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment is very essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the

power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the United National Development Fund for women (UNIFEM), the term women's empowerment means:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multi-level construct referring to individuals, organizations and community. It is an international, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to the control over these resources. Women empowerment may also mean equal status to women, opportunity and freedom to develop herself. The focus of empowerment is equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in the process of decision-making.

2. Review of Literature

H. Subrahmanyam (2011) ^[3] compares women education in India at present and Past. Author highlighted that there has a good progress in overall enrolment of girl students in schools.

The term empower means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is the process of acquiring some activities of women. M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011) [5] has highlighted that health of women members of SHG have certainly taken a turn to better. It clearly shows that health of women members discuss among themselves about health related problems of other members and their children and make them aware of various Government provisions specially meant for them. Doepke M. Tertilt M. (2011) [2] Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of non-cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship. Duflo E. (2011) Women’s Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study argues that the inter relationships of the Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self-sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women. K. Geetanjali *et al.* (2011) [4] has compared the status of women in India with those of other countries. Women in Europe were almost at par with men and have equal participation in public sphere.

3. Objectives of the Present Study

This research paper has the following objectives:

1. To understand the level of Equality in total enrolment among male and female in higher education in India.
2. To check the Gross Enrolment Ratio among male and female between 18-23 age group in higher education in India.
3. To analyze the status of Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in India.

4. To discuss the Role of Education in achieving Gender Equality and Women Empowerment.

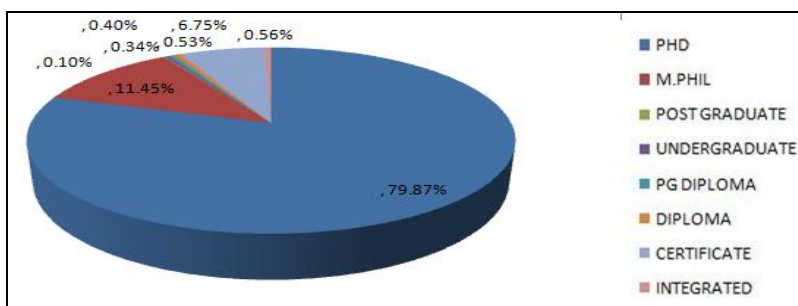
4. Methodology & Database

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study. Necessary secondary data on conceptual frame work and review of literature are collected from Journals, Magazines, Newsletters, Newspapers, Periodicals, Reference Books, including the AISHE reports and documents of Ministry of Human Resource Development, various regulatory bodies like National Sample Survey Organization, Five Year plan documents, Office of Registrar General of India, Report of Census of India etc. and various other publications. Statistical methods were used for the determination of various aspects of inequalities and empowerment of women.

5. Results and Discussion

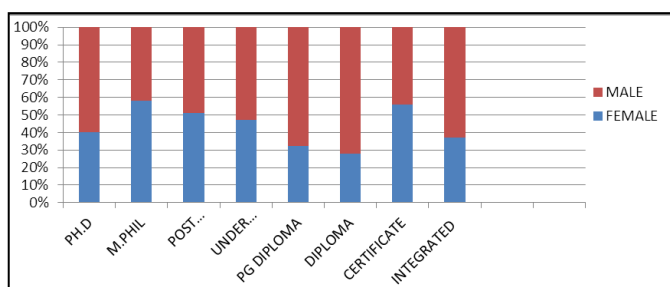
Level of Equality in total enrolment among male and female in higher education in India

Total Enrolment in Higher Education has been estimated to be 33.3 million with 17.9 million boys and 15.4 million girls. Girls constitute 46% of the total enrolment. Total Student enrolment has been classified in 8 levels viz – Ph.D., M. Phil., Post Graduate, Under Graduate, PG Diploma, Diploma, Certificate and Integrated. Percentage share of student enrolment in these levels are shown in Figure-1. The highest numbers of students are seen enrolled at Under Graduate level across India. Out of the total 3,32,72,722 students, a vast majority of 2,65,76,140 students are enrolled in Under Graduate that is a sweeping 79.9%. On the other hand, second to Under Graduate, 11.45% students are enrolled in Post-Graduation which is approximately 38.1 lakh students.



AISHE REPORT 2014-15 (P)

Fig 1: Students Enrolment by Levels



AISHE REPORT 2014-15 (P)

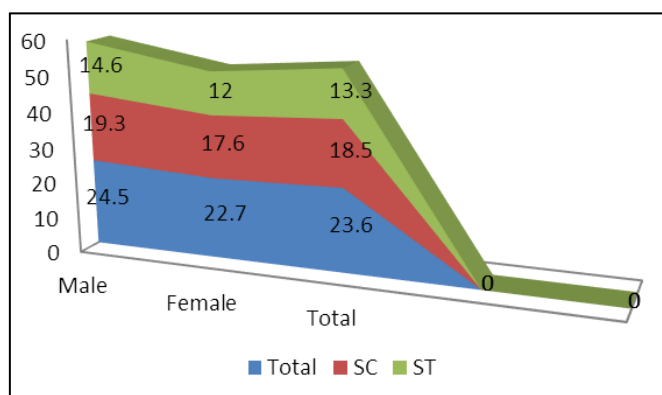
Fig 2: Gender distribution at Different Levels

Taking a look at the Male-Female ratio at each level in Figure 2, the trend is of higher males than females in almost every

level, except M.Phil. Post Graduate and Certificate, wherein, the female enrolment is slightly higher than male enrolment. Student enrolment at Under Graduate level has 53% male and 47% female. Post Graduate level has 49% males and 51% females. Diploma has an unbalanced distribution with 72% males and 28% females. Ph.D. level has 60% male and 40% female. Integrated level has 63% male and 37% female. PG Diploma student enrolment projects the most lopsided picture with 55% male students and 26% female students. There are more than 76% colleges running in Private sector; aided and unaided taking together, but it caters only 63% of the total enrolment. It shows lower per college enrolment in private sector. State-wise enrolment in Private and Government Colleges as per response is given in this figure.

Gross Enrolment Ratio among male and female between 18-23 age group in higher education

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) among male and female in Higher education in India is 23.6%, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. For Scheduled Castes it is 18.5% and for Scheduled Tribes it is 13.3%. Gender Parity Index (GPI) at all India level for all categories is .93 whereas for SC it is .91 and for ST it is .82. GER for male population at all India level is 24.5% whereas for SC Males, it is 19.3% and 14.6% for ST males. Similarly GER for female population at all India level is 22.7% whereas for SC females are 17.6% and for ST females, it is 12.0%. it is 13.3 as compared to the national GER of 23.6. For international comparability, GER has also been calculated taking 18-22 years Population and it comes out to be 27.4 at All India Level. There is gradual increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in almost all the States in the country over the year. The GER of last three years i.e. 2012-13(21.5), 2013-14(23) and 2014-15(23.6).



AISHE REPORT 2014-15 (P)

Fig 3: Distribution according to Social category and Gender

In the recent decades, some significant progress has been made towards the gender issue. For instance, literacy rate among the women are increasing gradually, gender gap in Gross enrollment rate reduced remarkably, and women participation in higher education is slightly increasing despite of considerable progress in reducing gender gap. 71st United Nations General Assembly on 20th Sept. 2016, UN Women unveiled the first-ever HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 University Parity Report. In the groundbreaking report, 10 leading global universities lay out concrete commitments and begin charting their progress toward achieving gender parity. Launched in 2015, the HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 is an initiative that convenes ten heads of state, ten global CEOs and ten university presidents to fast-track gender equality in boardrooms, classrooms and world capitals.

Status of Women Empowerment and Gender Equality

The status of Women Empowerment cannot be visualized with single dimension rather multidimensional assessment in terms of various components of women’s life and their status would bring a clear conception. So, this paper tries to give a basic idea about the condition and status of women in terms of employment, education, health and social status. Women constitute nearly half of the country’s 1.25 billion people and gender equality — whether in politics, economics, education or health — is still a distant dream for most. This fact was driven home again sharply by the recently released United

National Development Programme’s Human Development Report (HDR) 2015 which ranks India at a lowly 130 out of 155 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (GII). India trails behind most Asian countries, including lesser developed Bangladesh and Pakistan which rank 111 and 121 respectively, and fares not much ahead of war-ravaged Afghanistan at 152. The GII reflects gender-based inequalities on three vital parameters: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. India’s record, dismal on all three counts, is especially disquieting when it comes to representation of women in Parliament. Just 12.2 per cent of parliamentary seats in the world’s largest democracy are held by women as against 19.7 in Pakistan, 20 in Bangladesh and 27.6 percent in Afghanistan. Even some of the poorest nations — such as Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Uganda, and Mozambique— are way ahead by having over a third to half of their parliament seats occupied by women.

Health remains a niggling worry as well with Indian women’s maternal mortality rate (MMR) being one of the world’s highest. The country witnesses 190 deaths per 100,000 live births as compared to 170 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 births in both Bangladesh and Pakistan, states the HDR. Even in terms of the percentage of women receiving secondary education, Bangladesh at 34 per cent outsmarts India at 27 per cent. On labour force participation rate for women, as compared to Bangladesh’s 57 per cent, India is at 27 per cent.

The only parameter where India scores marginally better is the adolescent birth rate or the number of births per 1000 women aged 15 to 19 years. Here, over the last couple of years, India’s GII values have improved marginally from 0.61 to 0.563.

However, India’s low GII scores are hardly surprising given the country’s fierce resistance to change and entrenched patriarchal mindsets. “We’ve been featuring at the bottom of the gender equity pyramid for years. So what’s new?” Dr. Ranjana Kumari, Director, Center for Social Research, a New Delhi-based non-profit, told IPS. “Though the gender agenda has higher visibility in India now, that positive momentum hasn’t really translated into higher investment for women in different sectors due to continued discrimination and ineffectual laws and policies. The overall status of women in terms of gender gap index prepared by World Economic Forum in 2014 as shown in table-1.

Table 1: Gender Gap Index 2014

India	2014*		2013**	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Overall Index	114	0.646	101	0.655
Educational Attainment	126	0.85	120	0.857
Health And Survival	141	0.937	135	0.931
Political Empowerment	15	0.385	9	0.385
Economic Participation & Opportunity	134	0.41	124	0.446

0 = INEQUALITY: 1 = EQUALITY *Out of 142 countries, **Out of 136 countries.

In economic participation and opportunity India ranks 134th overall with low scores in terms of labour force participation, wage equality and estimated earned income. Equality in terms of health and survival remains a problem India ranked 141but in political empowerment India stood 15th globally. If we

compare India with the World in Gender Equality and Women empowerment, India trails far behind both China and Western Europe. Women’s unemployment or underemployment issues can be deeply transformative for the country’s economy, says a McKinsey Global Institute report,

“The Power of Parity: Advancing Women’s Equality in India”. The report states that improving gender parity at the workplace can help India add a whopping 2.9 trillion dollars to its GDP in 2025.

Table 2: India Trails Far Behind both China and Western Europe (2015)

	Western Europe	China	INDIA
Gender Equality At Work	Labour force participation (female/ male ratio) 0.792	0.817	0.338
	Unpaid care work (male /female) 0.482	0.389	0.102
Gender Equality In Society	Maternal mortality per 100,000 births 6	32	190
	Education level (female/ male ratio) 0.997	0.973	0.763
Legal Protection and Political Voice	Legal protection index 0.771	0.583	0.399
	Political representation (female /male ratio) 0.486	0.191	0.114
Physical Security and Autonomy	Child marriage(%age of girls 1	2	27
	Voilence against women(%age of women) 22	15	37

Source: Mckinsey Global Institute Report of Parity Advancing Women’s Equality November, 2015

As per Work Place Index September 2016 prepared jointly by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a top American think tank, and Nathan Associates, gave Sikkim highest possible 40 points while Delhi received just 8.5 reflecting that Sikkim has the best working conditions for women in the workplace, high rates of female work force participation and high conviction rates for workforce crimes against women as National Capital Delhi shows the worst working conditions for women. Over all India has the World’s lowest rate i.e 24% of female workforce participation, a serious drag on growth. Despite the much touted ‘Equal pay for Equal work’, the gender pay gap is very real. The Monster Salary Index (2016) shows that the gap is as much as 27%, so the median gross salary for men is 27% more than that disbursed to a woman doing the same amount of work for the same amount of time. This disparity is more pronounced in the IT sector where it is a whopping 34%. ‘Catalyst’, a nonprofit organization that works for inclusive workplaces, reports that 12 years into their service, women receive Rs. 3.8 lakh less salary than men. And such gender pay inequalities are not just restricted to developing countries even in a progressive country like the U.S. women earn 78 cents as against a dollar earned by men. So, there still exists huge discrimination against women in different sectors such as women have less access than men to resources and economic opportunity. Furthermore, they have limited access to a wide range of services and the movement of women is still restricted in many societies (World Bank, 2012) [13]. It is evident that the status of women has changed a little, in particular they have achieved a little gain in economic well-being due to traditional social structure (Shahnaj Parveen, 2008; Tamale, S. 2004) [8].

The current gender picture appears even more disconcerting, as the principle of gender equality as enshrined in the Indian constitution. The framework of Indian laws, development policies, plans and programs too, are aimed at women’s advancement and equality. India, also a signatory to the Millennium Declaration adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2000, has reaffirmed its commitment towards promoting gender parity.

Role of Education in achieving Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

Education is a powerful tool of social transformation "It is

one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process." —ICPD Programme of Action, paragraph 4.2. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women’s literacy rates are significantly lower than men’s in most developing countries. The education of parents is also linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children. Hence, education for Women has to be paid special attention. Greater access for women to education must be ensured in the educational system. Gender sensitivity must be developed. A watch has to be kept on dropout rate of girls and corrective measures should be taken to check the dropout rates. So, education can be an effective tool for women’s empowerment and gender equality, the parameters of which are: Enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence of women, Building a positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, polity and the economy, Developing ability to think critically, Fostering decision making and action through collective processes and Enabling women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health (especially reproductive health). To be fair, some measures have been taken by the Center to address the gender parity skew. The government has announced a 33 per cent reservation for women in police forces of union territories, including Delhi, for posts from constables to sub-inspectors to make the police more gender-sensitive. Another scheme — ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ (Save the Daughter, Educate Her) — focuses on improving the life of the girl child in 100

districts with low child sex ratio (CSR), meaning many fewer girls than boys. The initiative is especially critical for a country like India which hosts one of the world's lowest CSRs. Daman and Diu records a CSR of 618 girls per 1,000 boys. Closing the gender gap in education is a development priority. The 1994 Cairo Consensus recognized education, especially for women, as a force for social and economic development. Universal completion of primary education was set as a 20-year goal, as was wider access to secondary and higher education among girls and women. Closing the gender gap in education by 2015 was also one of the benchmarks for the Millennium Development Goals. So, Education can bring the desirable behavioural changes among the women and make them well-equipped in terms of knowledge, competence and capacity to deal with different political, social and economic problems.

6. Conclusion

Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. Women must be given freedom to choose their interest of work and discharge their duties unbiased. Government should open its doors for women to be given opportunities to prove themselves on a par with the men. So, Gender equality plays a crucial role in uplifting women. Rather, gender inequality certainly needs to be abolished. The key to achieving gender parity is resources. We need gender-responsive budgeting and money to be allocated and spent effectively on achieving these goals. Any breakthrough on gender equality also requires changes in the mindsets of all stakeholders –including legislators, administrators as well as the public — so that every social, economic and political issue can be made gender-sensitive.

"When women are the advisor, the Lords of creation don't take the advice till they have persuaded themselves that it is just what they intended to do; then they act upon it and if it succeeds, they give the weaker vessel half the credit of it; if fails, they generously give herself the whole".

7. References

1. Duflo E. Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge. 2011.
2. Doepke Matthias, Michèle Tertilt. Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? 2011.
3. Subramanyam H. Women Education in India Facts and Factors, Asian Entrepreneur. 2011, 61-71.
4. Geetanjali K. *et al.* Status of Women in India and Abroad, Women Empowerment and Social Development, the Associated Publication, Ambala, 2011; 8(2):1-8.
5. Bhavani Shankar Rao M. Impact of SHG on Family Welfare Programme, Asian Entrepreneur, 2011, 20-30.
6. Lal Neeta. India Needs to Save its Daughters Through Education and Gender Equality, Inter Press Service, 2016.
7. New HeForShe report puts spotlight on gender equality in global universities, Gender equality and women's empowerment, News, Press material. 2016.
8. Shahnaj Parveen. Gender Awareness of Rural Women in Bangladesh, Journal of International Women's Studies. 2007, 2008; 9(1).
9. Singh Rachna. Second Among Equals' the Tribune. 2016, 3.
10. Sikkim best place to work for women", The Tribune. 2016, 1.
11. United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report. 2013, 2015.
12. World Bank. World Development Report-2012; Gender equality and Development, World Bank, 2012.
13. World Bank. Toward Gender Equality: East Asia and the Pacific, Regional report. 2012.