



Progress Of Women Education In India Since Independence: An Empirical Overview

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Abstract

Women education has always been traditionally ignored or not given enough importance due to undervaluation of their contribution in family income especially of the natal family. Therefore, parents are reluctant to invest much in daughter's education. However, parental attitude towards their education has changed as societal outlook and labour market dynamics have changed over time. This paper tries to shed lights on the progress of women education since independence. The study reveals that there had been significant positive change in women participation in school education as well as higher education though there is gap in the progression from lower stages of education to higher levels. Besides, in higher education though their participation has increased largely but it is more prominent in general degree courses rather than professional degrees. Faculty wise distribution reveals that women are still far behind men in terms of their participation in professional education.

Keywords: Women's education, gross enrolment ratio, higher education, faculty wise distribution

I. Introduction

One of the most important prerequisite for the personal growth of any individual as well as for the overall progress of any society is education. According to the Mahatma Gandhi, 'by education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind, and spirit. Literacy is not the end of the education or even the beginning. It is one of the means where man and women can be educated'. In terms of educational achievement, women are still far behind men. While women's contribution in the family income especially of the natal family is often undervalued, investment in boy's education is seen as most important for securing family's collective future as they are considered as the main breadwinner of the family. Undervaluation of women's economic contribution leads to underrepresentation of women not only in different stages of education but also across different type of courses.

The education scenario of our country has seen rapid progress since independence due to government interventions as well as societal changes. The changing labour market dynamics has brought change in parent's mindset regarding daughter's education as well. However, gender gap in educational achievements still exists at every stage of education starting from primary level. Though participation of women in terms of their overall enrolment at various stages of education has increased over the period, but their discipline wise distribution especially at higher levels still reflect a very segregated picture. This paper sheds lights on the progress of women education in our country.

II. Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are –

1. To give an overview of the progress of girls' participation in school education since independence.
2. To find out the trend in women's participation in higher education in India.
3. To analyse the change in faculty wise distribution of women in higher education over time.

III. Findings and Discussion

Progress of girls in school education

School education serves as the base of educational pyramid of any country which provides the basis for higher education. In India, schooling participation largely depends upon two factors-one, the demand for educating a child and two, the supply of schooling facility especially neighbourhood schooling facility irrespective of gender of the child. Traditionally, the importance of educating daughter s used to be under reckoned by parents. During 1881, there were only 46 girls for every 1000 boys in schools in India (Indira, 1989). Later, due to interventions from different voluntary organisations and social workers, enrolment of women started increasing since the beginning of 20th century. In 1950-51, the share of girl's enrolment to total enrolment in primary education reached to 28.1 percent. At upper primary level, their percentage share was 16.1 percent whereas in secondary and higher secondary level it was only 13.3 percent. Since then, the numbers have increased over the years mainly through government interventions and change in parental attitude towards girls' education. The SES data (Table 1) shows that in 2005-06, girl's share in total enrolment at primary stage was 46.6 percent followed by 44.7percent at Middle/Upper Primary level and 42.0 percent in Secondary & higher Secondary level. Later, the newly enacted Right to Education act of 2009 become a major turning point for school education in India. It made education free and compulsory till the age of 14. Since then, girls' enrolment started increasing rapidly. As per the recent data available, their share in total enrolment at primary level has increased to 48.2 percent while the same has increased to 48.6 percent and 49.5 percent for middle and secondary/higher secondary level.

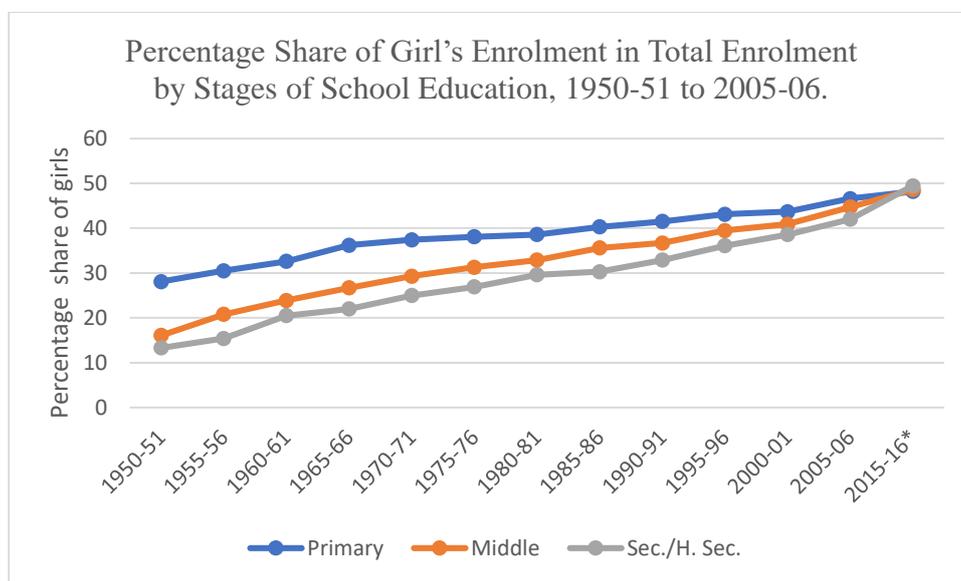


Figure 1

Source: SES, Time series Data, GOI, 2005-06.

* Data calculated from Educational statistics at a glance, 2018, MHRD, GOI.

In terms of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), girls have come across a long way. During 1950-51, their gross enrolment ratio in both primary as well as in upper primary level was very low. In upper primary level, their GER was only 4.6 percent. After independence, initially, girls' enrolment at school level increased due to the constitutional provision which assured free and compulsory education of all children till the age of 14. GER of girls increased from 24.8 to 41.4 percent at primary level between 1950-51 and 1960-61 which further improved in the following years. Girls' GER increased at upper primary level as well. In the year 2000-01, their gross enrolment ratio reached to 85.9 percent at primary stage and to 49.9 percent at upper primary stage. Increase in their enrolment narrowed down the existing gender gap. Since 2010-11, their GER at primary level is higher than boys.

In the following years, many welcoming changes came through government interventions and policy initiatives. In the year 2009, the right to education act came into force which again stressed on 'free and compulsory education' for children up to the age of 14. Moreover, it also recommended that students do not require to pass any exam till they complete elementary education. Many state governments also took initiatives to increase participation of girls in school education. For example, Bihar government introduced bicycle program in the year 2016 in which bicycle is provided to girls who continue their secondary education. The program was aimed to ensure better access to education. Later, studies found that this scheme brought positive change in girl's enrolment (Muralidharan and Prakash, 2017).

Table 1 Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) at different stages of School Education

Years	Primary (6-10 age)		Upper primary (11-13 age)		Secondary (14-15 years)		Higher Secondary (16-17 years)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1950-51	60.6	24.8	20.6	4.6	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1960-61	82.6	41.4	33.2	11.3	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1970-71	95.5	60.5	46.3	20.8	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1980-81	95.8	64.1	54.3	28.6	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1990-91	94.8	71.9	80.1	51.9	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
2000-01	104.9	85.9	66.7	49.9	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
2010-11	114.9	116.3	87.5	82.9	69.2	60.9	42.3	36.2
2015-16	97.9	100.7	88.7	98.6	79.2	81.0	56.0	56.4

Data Source: Educational statistics at a glance, MHRD, GOI, 2018.

Progress in Participation of Women in Higher Education

Progress in terms of share of girls' enrolment to total enrolment in higher education

On the onset of Independence, all stakeholders agreed that it is of utmost importance that the disadvantaged groups should have more access to education which includes women as well. Before independence, women's education was mainly confined within the school education system. The need for women's higher education was not well understood as it was lacking a direct link with their social role as a mother or as a wife (Chanana, 2001). The educational statistics reflected the same. During 1916-17, women accounted for only 1.24 percent of the total enrolment in higher education (Planning commission of India, 2000). Later, due to liberal policies of British Government and social reform movements which emphasised on the role of women education in the overall reform of the society, women's enrolment started increasing. In 1947-48, the total enrolment of women in higher education reached 9.35 percent (Planning commission of India, 2000).

Soon after independence, the demand for educated, skilled and trained manpower went up and consequently, the government started major initiatives for raising the overall enrolment as well as enrolment in professional education. Many higher educational institutes like colleges, universities, training institutes etc. were established. On the backdrop of these changes, the meaning of higher education for women also got changed. While the overall enrolment of men increased, women enrolment also saw appreciable increase. During 1950-51, girls' share in total enrolment at higher education level was only 10 percent which became 49.03 percent in 2019-20.

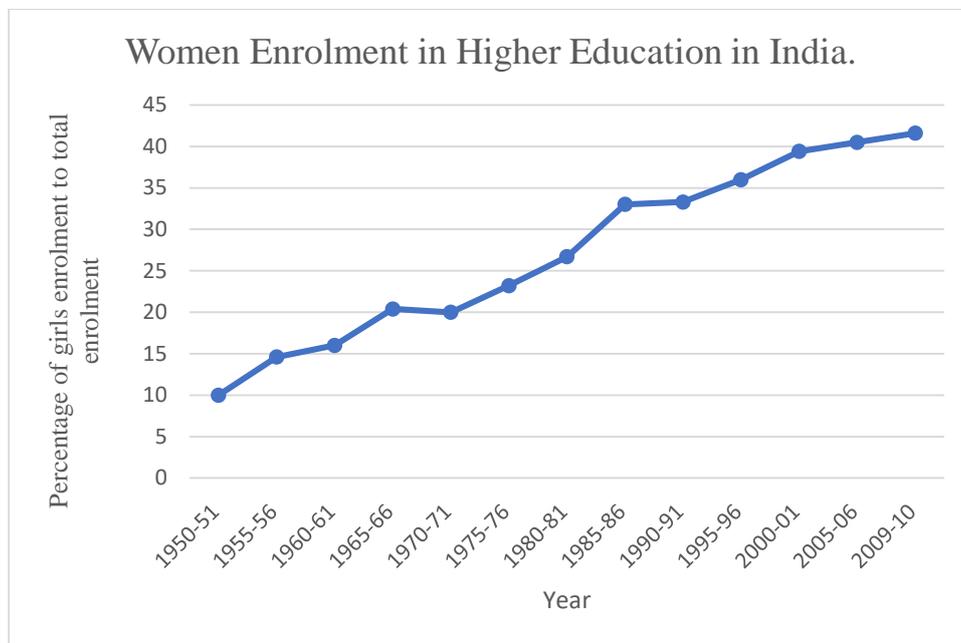


Figure 2

Source: Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource, GOI.

Changes in girls' enrolment across different classes of higher education

Besides the overall increase in enrolment, percentage share of girls in total enrolment increased in all classes including the male dominated ones. In 1980-81, the men women ratio was highly skewed in favour of men for almost all the classes. But women made a significant progress in the following years. In 2019-20, their share has increased up to a level where the men-women ratio became skewed in favour of women in most of the general degree courses and female-dominated courses like in teachers training and M.B.B.S. Percentage share of women is highest in teacher's training programmes like B.Ed. and B.T. (65.97 percent). Their share in total enrolment is equally high, sometimes more than men, across different post graduate level general degree courses like M.A., M.Sc. And M.Com. However, percentage enrolment of women surpassing men's enrolment at post graduate level also means that while men opt out from general degree courses at higher level to pursue other career-oriented courses or for preparing for jobs women continue their higher studies in the conventional way.

Table 2 Percentage of Women in Total Enrolment in different Classes of Higher Education (1980-81 to 2019-20).

Class	1980-81		1990-91		2000-01		2010-11		2019-20	
	Men	Women								
PhD/D.Sc./D.Phil.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	64.77	35.23	61.64	38.36	54.83	45.17
M.A.	62.12	37.88	62.09	37.91	63.42	36.58	47.03	52.97	37.66	62.34
M.Sc.	68.37	31.63	66.13	33.87	55.54	44.46	50.18	49.82	37.48	62.52
M.Com.	92.37	7.63	81.08	18.92	62.29	37.71	48.78	51.22	36.68	63.32
B.A. /B.A. Hons.	64.22	35.78	59.89	40.11	61.88	38.12	50.63	49.37	46.59	53.41
B.Sc./ B.Sc. Hons.	73.12	26.88	62.87	37.13	62.53	37.47	54.23	45.77	48.58	41.42
B.Com. / B.Com. Hons.	85.98	14.02	75.57	24.43	64.55	35.45	58.29	41.71	51.22	48.78
B.E./B.Sc. (Eng.) /B.Arch./B.Tech.	96.43	3.57	89.11	10.89	77.70	22.30	70.59	29.41	70.78	29.22
B.Ed. /B.T.	59.14	40.86	55.8	44.2	57.19	42.81	38.70	61.30	34.03	65.97
M.B.B.S.	75.73	24.27	65.74	34.26	59.45	40.55	60.82	39.18	50.19	49.81

Source: Data compiled by the Author from AISHE reports, Various Years.

Women's participation in commerce, technology and medical education was very low in the initial years after independence. Later, like other courses, their share in total enrolment also increased in these courses as well. However, women's share is still strikingly very low in technical courses like B.E., B.Arch. etc. (29.22 percent) which means though women have surpassed men in some courses but they are still lagged behind men in terms of participation in professional courses.

Faculty wise changes in women's enrolment in higher education

With increase in overall enrolment of women in higher education, their faculty-wise participation also saw rapid positive changes. In arts, their percentage share was only 16.1 percent during 1950-51 which reached to 52.83 percent in 2016-17.

Besides arts, their share increased in male dominated faculty like Commerce and Engineering/technology education as well. Since 1980-81 their participation in engineering saw rapid increase. This was mainly due to liberalisation and privatisation policy taken by the Government which led to increased demand for engineers, mushrooming of private engineering colleges and opening of desk-based computer related jobs which not only encouraged parents to send their daughters to participate in these courses but also encouraged women to pursue these courses (Gupta, 2012).

Table 3 Percentage share of Women in Higher education in India, 1950-51 to 2015-16.

FACULTY	1950-51	1970-71	1980-81	2000-01	2010-11	2015-16
Arts	16.08	31.73	37.71	45.00	47.02	53.93
Science	7.11	17.78	28.82	36.36	43.15	49.57
Commerce/Management	0.55	3.68	15.89	30.45	39.14	46.18
Education	32.38	36.54	47.34	51.90	56.84	62.71
Engineering/Technology	0.16	1.01	3.84	20.60	27.97	27.84
Medicine	16.34	22.84	24.36	45.03	50.58	60.47
Agriculture	-	-	-	20.50	27.03	27.34
Veterinary Science & others	5.83	9.52	12.53	37.72	36.25	31.53
Law	2.12	3.72	6.85	19.40	25.63	33.56

Source: Annual Reports, UGC, Various years.

* Medicine includes Nursing education as well.

Besides engineering, their participation in commerce/management and law also rapid increase since 1970s (Chanana, 2000). Despite increase in participation, however, women's representation in science faculty and professional courses was very low till the beginning of 21st century. According to Vineeta Bal (2002) from insignificant minority women become a significant minority.

Table 4 is showing faculty-wise distribution of students enrolled for higher education since independence.

Table 4 Faculty-wise Distribution of Men and Women Students in Higher Education in India.

FACULTY	1950-51 ¹	1960-61 ¹	1980-81 ¹	2000-01 ²	2010-11 ²	2015-16 ²
Men						

Arts	43.19	41.7	34.6	37.73	32.97	31.51
Science	33.4	30.8	19	20.08	17.91	18.19
Commerce/Management	9.6	10.2	23.3	23.07	17.81	16.62
Education	0.8	1.5	1.9	1.31	2.48	2.70
Engineering/Technology	3.41	5.1	6.2	8.43	20.77	23.47
Medicine	3.61	3.1	4.2	2.88	3.25	2.94
Law	3.78	3	8.1	4.42	2.45	1.16
Agri, Veterinary Science & others	2.23	4.6	2.8	2.31	2.35	2.47
Women						
Arts	67.9	70.2	56.2	51.1	41.21	41.13
Science	21	18.6	20.6	19.0	19.14	19.94
Commerce/Management	0.4	0.5	11.8	16.7	16.12	15.91
Education	3.1	3.7	4.5	2.4	4.60	5.06
Engineering/Technology	0.04	0.2	0.7	3.6	11.36	10.10
Medicine	5.8	4.5	3.6	3.9	4.68	5.02
Law	0.7	0.5	1.6	1.8	1.19	1.18
Agri., Veterinary Science & others	1.1	1.8	1.2	1.5	1.70	1.56

Source: ¹ Taken from Chanana, 2001.

² Annual Reports, UGC, Various years.

The table shows that women students were fairly represented in arts faculty throughout the past decades. In 1960-61, while more than 70 percent women were enrolled in arts faculty, only 18 percent were in science. In commerce it was even lower (0.5 percent). Since then, their participation in commerce/management faculty increased till the year 2000-01 whereas it decreased in arts faculty. After that participation in science and commerce remained stagnant. Between 2005-06 and 2010-11, women's percentage in engineering education saw rapid increase while it decreased in arts. Growing IT sector and opening of women-friendly desk-based computer related jobs encouraged more women to enrol for engineering.

IV. Conclusion

The study reveals that there had been a significant progress in women's education in terms of overall participation as well as participation across different stages of education. However, it also reveals that their representation is much higher in general degree courses like B.A., and M.A., and courses related to teaching like B.Ed., B.T. etc than in professional courses like B.E./B.Tech. and MBBS. In terms of disciplinary choices though women's enrolment has increased over the time in male dominated courses like commerce and engineering but still majority of women opt for arts and humanities.

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