

Higher Education and Development From a Women's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The ideology of Domestication still continues to impinge upon women's accessibility to higher education. The paper aims to examine the status quo with regard to the major issues related to women in higher education. It examines societal attitudes to women, their lower enrolments in higher education till date and finally, the absence of a gender dimension in the higher education curriculum. It points to strategies which may help higher education stakeholders in their efforts to strengthen the role of women in this sector and their contribution to social development in general. The paper is rooted in both primary and secondary sources and aims to assess the issue of women's position in higher education in India, an issue of serious concern considering that South Asia – of which India constitutes a significant part – which has traditionally been among the geographies with persistently high gender disparities. It examines, among others, the following: women's approach to higher education, the linkage between education, employment and women's development. This explains the reasons as to why immense studies on gender equity in education continue to pour in especially in developing and low-income countries. Based on insights from secondary and primary sources, the paper seeks to unearth multiple dimensions concerning the woman-higher education linkage: opportunities, obstructions, accomplishments, gaps and challenges.

Key Words : Higher Education, Women's Empowerment, Development, Security, Feminine

INTRODUCTION

Access, process, and outcomes are distinct aspects of higher education that need to be examined separately. This paper is devoted to the analysis of these three issues. It is said, women are in majority in classrooms and in minority in employment. Even though women have made advances in higher education on multiple levels, research that is explicitly feminist is underrepresented in mainstream higher education academic journals. As Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2011) argue, while feminist research is not a panacea for all issues in higher education, it has much to contribute to understanding and addressing the gendered contexts of colleges, universities, and educational policy. Moreover, it is often stated and observed, women are in majority in higher education;

however, they are in minority in employment. It is increasingly noticed, women join the domain of education in general and that of higher education in particular in large number. Surprisingly, their number decreases as they move on to employment. In other words, their pursuit of higher education is not correspondingly resulting in pursuit of employment. That is, there exists a disjunction between access and outcome. The paper revolves around this fundamental conundrum.

Section-A: Text View:

Introduction:

It is often argued, the traditional stereotypes concerning the masculine-feminine dichotomy still impinge upon one's overall imagination: there is a tendency to apply the dichotomous categories of active versus

passive, emotional versus rational, nature versus culture, dependent versus autonomous and the like in all walks of life; the domain of education is no exception. It is said, higher education assists females in two ways. It empowers qualified women to become leaders in society and it permits them to become role models for younger girls. It also helps women to choose domains of expertise, whether this is as decision makers through influence on policy issues related to social, economic, and cultural development, or by their participation in family and community life (Shaukat and Pell, 2015). Historically, females, as compared to males, have represented a lower percentage of college professors and administrators in India. The tendency for males to outnumber females in the professoriate and college administration has existed also in developed nations where in United States higher education institutions formed in the early 1800s reveals the fact and still persists today. Fluctuations in women's participation rate have been influenced by the economy's history and society's expectations of females (Parker, 2015). The problem of educational imbalance between men and women is an international concern that is more serious in the least developed countries. The issue of gender parity is not a recent revelation, nor is the literature on the topic of women's educational pursuits lacking. For the most part, information regarding women's access to education in developing countries can be found in reports from the World Bank, the United Nations agencies (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, etc.), and other international agencies. This information adds to the wider knowledge base regarding the importance of educated women and their positive contributions to society. Women represented 55% of the higher education student population in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) area – 1.2 women to every man – according to an OECD report published in 2008. In the US, nearly 60% of university graduates are women, plus 60% of master's degrees and 52% of doctoral degrees are awarded to women. More women than men are enrolled in universities in Jordan, Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates. Research indicates that in most developing countries, women are left behind in educational training, scientific knowledge, and technological literacy and are therefore at a disadvantage. Higher education is repeatedly positioned by the international community, that is, the World Bank, The Africa Commission, and UNESCO, as a central site

for facilitating skills, disseminating knowledge and providing expertise, all essential to economic and social development in low-income countries (World Bank, 2005). All over the world, there is growing concern that women continue to experience discriminatory practices and exclusions within higher education. Jacobs (1996) based on his studies in the United States of America proposes that gender differences in earnings persist despite the parity in education attained by women.

The Indian Scenario:

The history of female education in India has its roots in the British Regime. In 1854 the East India Company acknowledged women's education and employment. Initially this education was limited only to primary school level education and only the richer section of the society enjoyed this facility. It was only with the establishment of municipalities and local fund committees in 1870 that it was possible to promote girls' education through local public funds. Schools were opened and even SNDT University, the 1st women's university was established in 1915 by the pioneering efforts of D.K.Karve. By the end of the 19th century, women were graduating from colleges and universities in a sizeable number. (In 1882 there were 2,700 schools and colleges for girls with 127,000 students) The social reform movement of the 19th century (that originated within the Indian intelligentsia and later spread to sections of the middle classes) had a major role in this upsurge of education amongst women, but this movement was largely an urban phenomenon. This period coincided with several other reforms such as child marriage, Sati pratha, Purdah system etc. Many universities were established during this period. Banara Hindu University in 1916, Aligarh Muslim University in 1920, and Delhi University in 1922 became new hubs of women's liberation. The literacy rate for women was 0.2% in 1882 and 6% only in 1947. It is very unfortunate to say that for centuries higher education for women has been neglected. Thus in 1958, the government of India appointed a national committee for the education of women. The committee submitted report in favour of women's education. The government of India accepted most of the recommendations of the committee. Since independence there had been a phenomenal growth in the number of woman students' enrolment in higher education. On the eve of the Independence, women enrolment was less than 10 per cent of the total enrolment but in the academic year 2010-11 women's enrolment

increased up to 41.5 per cent.

Greater presence of women in higher education:

As one looks at the scenario of education in India, it appears that the presence of women in higher education especially after Independence shows a positive trend. Women's new ability to combine studies and work with family life in many places was revealed to trigger the situation. Decreasing discrimination against girls in families (again, in many places) and girls' increased preparation for higher education, as evidenced by their test scores in secondary education also played a major role. Girls' higher aspirations to obtain tertiary degrees became extremely important. While one notices a reversal of gender inequality in higher education in other countries, the scenario in China and India is still not much encouraging. In China and India, men still outnumber women in higher education, but not by much: women make up 48% of the university population in China and 42% in India. The current scenario reveals that among the states, Goa with 61.2% topped in terms of women's enrolment followed by Kerala (56.8%), Meghalaya (51.8%) and Nagaland (50.5%). There are states where women's enrolment is below the national average (41.5%), Bihar recording the lowest at 31.2%.

One of the most spectacular achievements of India since Independence is the expansion of women's higher education. There were sixty women's colleges on the eve of Independence. Today the number is more than trebled. The most glaring change is the phenomenon of a large number of educated girls both married and unmarried in employment. In the beginning, there were only unmarried women in service and that again only in the fields of teaching and medicine, as there were no other openings for them at that time. But today conditions have changed and women are in almost every walk of life (Shridevi, 1972). Even married women encouraged by other women's example and unmindful of conditions in their own families are tempted to enter service. In the case of women enjoying economic freedom, marriage is no longer an economic necessity but has become a matter of one of their choices. Manuh (2002) reveals that higher education has often played a pivotal role in critiquing the structure of social inequalities with major ethical and policy implications. It has also contributed to public debates around various forms of discrimination and has produced a wealth of gender experts working transnational. Females downplay their skills and are

discouraged from entering fields dominated by men. When they graduate, women often confront poor employment prospects, receive lower salaries, and have fewer opportunities to advance as Morley (2005) asserts that although there have been some equity gains in higher education, particularly in relation to women's access as students, universal patriarchal power appears hard to neutralize in elite professions. Higher education is expanding internationally both in responses to state investment in the knowledge economy and as a consequence of new private and offshore providers.

Women in higher education: More educated and less employed:

Speaking in economic terms, every investment is evaluated in terms of its outcomes. It is sufficiently established that breaking all barriers, women in large number are taking degrees in higher education. The question begins here: where are they going to? What are they doing after completion of all degrees? Do they all succeed in pursuing career in employment? Why is their representation in employment much lesser than their representation in higher education? When there were 14 girls per 100 boys in the domain of higher education, the question was why were girls not accessing the system? Now, when there are 65 girls per 100 boys, the questions are more about topography of their access, how and where are they fitting into the system. Women's greater participation and attainment in higher education has yet to translate into the world of paid work/ employment. Morley (1997) argues that in the economically-led expansion of market, participation of groups on gender and racial lines, that have hitherto remained underrepresented in higher education, has increased. Despite these educational gains, women continue to lag behind men in employment, income, business ownership, research and politics. This pattern of inequality suggests that societal expectations and cultural norms regarding the appropriate roles for men and women as well as inherent biological differences between the sexes are limiting the benefits of women's educational advantage. Women's presence in higher education and in employment has no doubt become noticeable but their new role remains an extension of the traditional role in a majority of cases (Chanana, 1990). Abu-Rabia-Queder (2008) based on studies in Arab societies concludes, women's increased access to higher education is indicative of a mere quantitative change, not a qualitative one.

Furthermore, although many women attend institutions of higher learning, they do not necessarily join the work force. Women obtain higher education and later obtain employment; but they may not achieve total autonomy.

Another reason for lower representation of women in the professions is that, although the percentages of women in male-dominated fields have increased in recent years, many women, even in today's society, are not as career-oriented as men. Other duties and tasks take precedence over a career, and women may spend time raising children or supporting a husband who is pursuing education or his way up the professional career ladder. Women's responsibilities in childbearing and domestic duties can infringe on or delay the pursuit of a career. Some women, either because of personal preference or the responsibilities of motherhood, will choose a lower-paying job that requires less education. Trow (1972) contend that attitudes are at the heart of the educational dilemma facing woman. The two horns of the dilemma involve the attitude of women toward themselves and, secondly, of men toward women and their educational and career opportunities. After receiving higher education, among women pursuing employment, most of them pursue dual role with guilt and apologies. Far more insidious is the attitude of men: fellow students, faculty, employers, fathers, boyfriends. Damico, Sandra B and Nevill, Dorothy (1978) point out that social factors do operate to limit the participation of women in higher education, and subsequently the professions. On the other hand, many women with mothers and grandmothers who were domestic housewives and mothers have chosen not to follow in the footsteps of their previous generations and found joy in the fulfillment of a successful career. Each person and each generation chooses various paths (Parker, 2015). Therefore, Indian women are more educated, but less employed. Despite the fact that female literacy and education enrollment rates have been rising, India today has lower levels women's work force participation than many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Latest government statistics suggest that women's labor participation rate fell from 29.4 per cent in 2004-2005 to 22.5 per cent in 2011-2012. Data suggests that women in India are largely employed in the informal, semi-or unskilled sector such as domestic work, where incomes are low and there are limited benefits or job security. According to the ILO, in 2011-12, while 62.8 per cent of women were employed in the agriculture sector, only 20 per cent were employed in industry and

17 per cent in the services sectors. In urban areas, where education and income levels are higher, many married women drop out of the work force when they have children.

A survey of 1,000 working women in New Delhi found that only 18-34 per cent of women continued to work after having a child. Childcare is still considered an exclusive female responsibility. When it comes to women's economic participation, India's position seems fixed at the bottom even when we compare it to the entire world and not just the 20 major economies. It ranks 124 out of 136 nations, according to a World Economic Forum (WEF) report from last year. It fell from 33.7% in 1991 to 27% in 2012, according to UN gender statistics. In 2011-12, less than 20% of the total workers in non-agricultural sectors were women, according to India's statistics department. The spread of higher education is not uniform everywhere. It is argued, disparity in higher education in general and gender disparity in higher education in particular vary from country to country; within the same country from state to state; within the same state from region to region. Odisha is a case in point. There are more than 50 government colleges in urban centres and not a single one in rural areas. Women's presence is discouraged in a disguised manner by not opening women's hostels in metro colleges.

The study also highlights a contrasted version of traditionalist and modernity playing a role here. There are two different views on the question of women's participation in higher education that is traditional and modern. The traditional view supports women's education to equip them to become better wives and mother. This view believes that women's present education is entirely irrelevant in their lives. It is only waste of time and this does not help them to solve the problems of their daily life. This view believes that modern educated women are neither happy nor contented nor socially useful. She is misfit in life and needs opportunities for self expression. But modern attitude visualizes education as an instrument for women's equality and development. Traditional view still dominates in many minds. Look at the message attached to the *Ujala* scheme by the Government of India that propagates the following slogan: *Mahiaonko milaa samman*. It only confirms to the traditional sexual division of labour (men for paid work and women for domestic work). It is observed that, to claim that women are different says that women need different kinds of support, different opportunities, and different standards.

It would also indicate that women would be likely to respond in different ways and for different reasons (Hills and Rowan, 2002). It is a methodological blunder to propose that women always and everywhere pursue employment with a view to build up a career, create an independent identity and attain financial independence. In certain occasions, many women join employment owing to pressing constraints of bread and butter. As Hijab (1989) propose, whether or not they pursue an occupation depends on their families' financial needs and the state's need for labor.

Section-b: Field view:

Based on the literature cited, the impression that one begins to form is quite unambiguous. That is, women's access to higher education is burgeoning over time. Despite disparities, their presence and proportion in the domain is fast increasing, at times, outnumbering men. Ironically, the trend turns upside down topsy-turvily when it comes to employment. As said earlier, Indian women are more educated, but less employed. The reasons are not far to comprehend. Similar emancipatory changes have not yet taken place at similar rate at the level of social attitudes. A job model is employed for men and a gender model is applied for women when it comes to jobs. It appears, people are yet to rise above the *feminine mystique* that tends to reiterate the twin roles of wifeness and motherhood for woman: no matter how highly qualified a woman is; her primary responsibility as wife and mother stands unquestionable. The whole prejudice is perpetuated in the following manner.

Man= Public Sphere= Worker=Breadwinner
 Woman=Private Sphere=Non-worker=Homemaker

Salient focus of the study:

As one goes through the literature and confronts the contemporary social reality, the questions that haunt one's imagination are intriguing. To begin with,

- How do women relate to education in general and higher education in particular in 21st century?
- Why do women pursue higher education?
- Is it for marriage?
- Or, is it for having a presentable qualification?
- Is it for mere employment/ livelihood?
- Who decided their subjects?
- Given a possibility, what will a woman do in a situation when the male partner asks her to quit job? In other words, How will a woman respond when the

- husbands constrains her either to quit job or to quit him?
- How does education impact women: does it result in their development?
- Does it really empower them?

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on two components: conceptual and empirical. At the conceptual level as elaborated, it makes a review of existing studies in the field and seeks to develop an understanding of related concepts and theoretical viewpoints. At the empirical level, it is based on a fieldwork. Ravenshaw University, Cuttack is chosen as the site of empirical exploration. Information has been collected from 200 female Post Graduate students of the university from four faculties: Commerce, Humanities, Science and Social Science (50 from each faculty). In an exploratory study of this kind, the researcher makes use of focus group discussion for eliciting data from the respondents. Based on the study, the findings run in the following manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With regard to one's approach to higher education, cent per cent respondents opine that for them the pursuit of education is a means and not an end in itself. They relate to higher education with a sense of instrumental rationality.

Table 1 : Reasons behind the pursuit of higher education

Reasons	Number	Percentage
Job/ Employment	200	100%
High Qualification	160	80%
Status	136	68%
Better matrimonial prospects	112	56%

As evident, there has been a metamorphic shift in women's subjective meaning behind the pursuit of higher education. Cent per cent of the respondents, among other things, wish to pursue higher education with complete job orientation in mind. The other benefits that usually

Table 2 : Regarding Choice of the Programme/ Subjects

Programme/ Subject choice made or shaped by	Number	Percentage
Self	200	100%
Parents	---	---
Friends	---	---
Siblings	---	---

accompany are high qualification, status and better matrimonial prospects. In other words, attainment of financial independence constitute the supreme idea behind the pursuit of higher education.

What is astounding to find is the growing assertiveness among women. Cent per cent of the women propone that the choice of the programme/ subject is volitional in nature; that is, they have opted for their respective programmes/ subjects on the basis of their individual will, not conditioned by others' influence: be it parents, siblings and friends.

One notices a great deal of determination among female PG students. All of them wish to be careerists, pursue jobs in public work domain, earn livelihood and attain financial independence. All of them are of the firm opinion that job has the potential to give the much needed strength to bear risk/ crisis in personal life. If the male partner asks to quit job, she will prefer to continue with her job. On serious note, a question was asked regarding a situation in which they are confronted with a dilemma and constrained to make a choice: either to quit job or to quit husband. What is flabbergasting to note is that all women argue that given such constraint, they will prefer to quit husband, not job. As one respondent opines, "*my parents have invested so much on me with a dream to enable me to be employed and empowered. No partner has got the right to plunder that*".

Table 3 : Effect of Higher Education on Women

Effect of Education	Number	Percentage
Personal Empowerment	200	100%
Family Empowerment	--do--	--do--
Social Empowerment	--do--	--do--
Economic Empowerment	--do--	--do--

It is starkly found at the grassroots that access to higher education is thought to empower women in many ways. To begin with, as it is claimed by respondents, higher education contributes immensely to one's personal empowerment. One feels empowered from within. It contributes to realization of one's inner strength and talents. It tends to enhance one's level of confidence and self-concept. As Sarojini, one of the respondents, argues, "*members in groom's family may dislike you; but they cannot afford to neglect or ignore your concern if you are a truly educated woman or an employed woman*". In addition, woman's access to higher education results in empowerment of the family in the

sense that obtaining a higher degree certainly adds to her family honour. Further, cent per cent of the respondents aver that higher education leads to one's social empowerment. As one respondent opines, apart from information/ qualification, it enlarges one's interaction circle, social base and esteem in one's community. Besides, as all women affirm, access to higher education is the stepping stone to economic empowerment. A great deal of unanimity is found among all the respondents on the view that career along with higher education instills a colossal sense of security among them.

Finite propositions:

- Women wish to rise above the *feminine mystique* and be careerists and create identity independent of kinship.
- Contrary to the inveterate belief that women pursue higher education primarily as a form of attainment, earning of livelihood/ pursuit of employment constitutes the central focus of the pursuit of higher education by women in contemporary times. In an achieving society, women, too, wish to attain financial independence with grit, gumption, volition and ambition.
- Women increasingly have begun to be their own decision-makers.
- 21st century women in higher education no longer see marriage indispensable. Livelihood is seen a dependable proposition to fall back upon in times of crisis. Staying single is no longer viewed as a dangerous proposition. That is, marriage is no longer a necessity and staying single is no longer a taboo.
- Educated and employed women are taken more seriously in their families.
- There is a constitutive relationship between higher education and women's development contributing to empowerment of women: personal, familial, social and economic.
- Career along with higher education inculcates a great sense of security among women.

Conclusion:

This is purely an aspirational study. Like any other study, this study has got its own limitations. To begin with, the study is confined to exploration of the issue in one university only; that too, in one region/ state. The scenario in other regions/ state may be different. Further, attempts have been made to explore women's aspiration only; not

the outcome. In reality it is widely observed, there exists a huge gulf between women's aspiration and the actual outcome. That is, most of the women who take degrees are not in employment. More empirical studies can be conducted to analyze the gulf between aspiration and actual outcome.

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