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GENDER DISPARITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN RAJASTHAN

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Abstract:

India is a country which has become famous for its higher education system. In the last six decades the phenomenal growth in this sector has made it one of the largest education systems of the world. The establishment of the University Grants Commission as early as 1948 indicates the importance that was attached to higher education right from the time of independence. Higher education has been recognized as a powerful instrument of socioeconomic development and efforts have been made to make it more inclusive. Traditionally the deprived and marginalized sections of society, especially women have had limited access to higher education. Data collected by various government agencies have shown a substantial gender gap in enrollment ratio and other indicators of educational opportunity.

Rajasthan though being one of the larger states of the country, has been often classified as a BIMARU state. Any discussion on gender discrimination has never been complete without the mention of this state. The literacy rate of the general population in Rajasthan has been less than the national average. So, one can easily imagine the situation of women, in the state. In this paper the author has examined the state of Rajasthan and analyzed the trends witnessed in the higher education sector, with particular focus on women. Though, Rajasthan has had a literacy rate less than the national average but over the last few years a lot of push has been given to women's education in the state. Latest data shows a marked improvement in enrollment ratio of girls in schools in the state. But the trend in the higher education sector needs to be analyzed. The paper tries to trace the trends of women's participation in higher education using data from various government sources and agencies. Also an attempt is made to analyze the effectiveness of governmental policies in increasing the access of women to higher education.

keywords: Higher Education , establishment , educational opportunity.

INTRODUCTION

India as a society has always attached a great deal of value to knowledge. Indian history is replete with instances of knowledge being rewarded and revered. The dictum knowledge is power was always followed and people in power patronized learning and learned men. Universities at Takshila and Nalanda were world renowned centers of learning. Even during the present times India is recognized as a knowledge economy. Thus we can say that education was always given due importance and was considered the bed-rock of economic and social development.

Post independent India recognized the need to provide education to all its citizens and the Constitution under Article 45, required that the state provide free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. A lot of efforts were undertaken to provide education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was an ambitious project launched with the intention of achieving 100% literacy rates. But the

efforts have not met with the desired success. In order to make education accessible to all the Government of India has taken many initiatives. Education was made a Fundamental Right under the 86th Amendment of the Constitution in 2002. Now in India, the Right to Education Act, 2009 has been implemented for all the children covering the age of 6-14 years. The intent of the government is to make educational accessible to all sections of society.

Also the need to educate women has always been felt. Leaders of the country since independence acknowledged the importance of female literacy. S. Radhakrishnan, once said, 'there cannot be an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or to women, that opportunity should be given to women for then it would most surely be passed on to the next generation.' However despite the best intentions of most policy makers female literacy has been a big problem in the country. Some states like Kerala have been a little more successful in making their women literate as compared to some other states like Rajasthan and Bihar. It is commonly recognized that gender discrimination is rampant at all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary. It is also prevalent as a rural-urban gap and a caste based gap. Hence, women, by being women are a disadvantaged group and then being women belonging to a particular section of society – based on caste, region or religion – are further disadvantaged. Also the discrimination is not limited to just access to education, but stretches to the outcomes and level of participation of women in the workforce of the country.

Objectives of the Paper: This paper attempts to:

- ❖ Highlight the gender disparities in higher education in the state of Rajasthan, using evidence from various government reports and surveys.
- ❖ Critically analyze various state governmental policies for strengthening the higher education system in terms of access and equity.

Methodology: The paper is based on information collected using secondary data sources. Data from the Ministry of Education, Government of Rajasthan was taken to highlight gender disparity. Reports from various government agencies were also studied to get an assessment of policies and programmes undertaken for ensuring equity and access to education.

Literature Review: In the area of education and gender studies a lot of work has been done with reference to primary and secondary education. There are lots of research studies that have focused on enrollment ratio at these levels to highlight the inequality of education. However in the field of higher education there is a limited amount of literature available, particularly with reference to the state of Rajasthan. Most of the literature that was reviewed had a pan India context but helps one in understanding the dimensions of the problem at hand. Karuna Chanana, in her paper entitled '*Policy Discourse and Exclusion-Inclusion of Women in Higher Education in India*' has discussed the lack of parity that women have with respect to participation and outcomes of the education they receive. She has argued that 'the Indian educational policies designed to promote the education of girls and women are conceptualized within a very narrow framework, on the one hand, and are fragmented by a fractured vision of both the system of higher education and of the Indian society, on the other. As a result, gender concerns receive very little meaningful space in the final policy documents. This is because the cultural concerns colour the vision and value frames of the policy makers.' [Chanana, 2011].

Chauhan in his paper '*Participation of Women in Higher Education: The Indian Perspective*' has stated that deprived sections of the society, especially women, have had limited access to higher education. He has then analyzed gender-based educational disparities among various social sections with special reference to caste and religious affiliations. Chauhan argues that the policy of reservation in respect of SC, ST or OBC sections based on caste considerations has not yielded desired results for the simple reason that the elite layers among them cornered the entire benefit at the cost of those who actually deserved. 'In the case of women also, access to higher education has been monopolized mainly by those coming of affluent and urban dwellers to the further marginalization of women from poor and rural society.' He has concluded his discussion by saying that there is a need to open more higher-education institutions, colleges and universities for women in rural areas.

The studies in this volume observed that although the enrolment rate in higher education is about 11 %, there are significant inter group disparities in access to higher education. Ravi Srivastva and Amaresh Dubey based on the NSS data for the first time estimated the gross enrolment rate for various groups and bring out the variation in enrolment rate in 2004/5, between male -female, between SC, ST, OBC and other, between religious groups, economic groups such as self employed and wage laborer, between income groups (in term of per capita consumption expenditure) and poor and non poor.

The male-female disparities are examined in greater detail by Saraswati Raju in her paper entitled '*Gender Differentials in Access to Higher Education.*' Taking data from various NSS rounds she has discussed the disparity in higher education across states. 'The main exclusionary divide as far as access to higher education is concerned remains the rural urban divide. Rural women, almost without exception, have the lowest access to higher education. Amongst the rural women, it is essentially those from the lower rungs of socio-religious communities who have the lowest access in particular. While providing more colleges in the rural areas is necessary, it is crucial that rural women's access has to be considerably enhanced through their physical reach to already existing urban facilities.' While discussing policy considerations Raju highlights that out of the 8% of total UGC budget that is spent on women's scheme, as high as 95% is spent on hostels. Hence utilization of funds need to be monitored stringently.

Put together these studies provide good insight into inter- group differences in access to higher education in Indian society.

Anindita Chakrabarti in her article '*Determinants of Higher Education and Choice of Disciplines: Evidence from Urban and Rural Indian Youth*', has concluded that 'the gender impact in terms of higher education participation is more pronounced for the highest income/expenditure quartile for both urban and rural region. Analysis of choice of individual discipline of higher education reveals that female youth have significantly higher odds of attending a higher education institution for Arts/Humanities course in urban India as compared to her male counterpart. However, for every other stream, that is, Science, Commerce, Medicine, Engineering and other professional courses, there is a strong gender bias against female even after controlling for social and economic background of the household.' [Chakrabarti, 2009].

In a paper entitled '*Caste and Discrimination in Higher Education: Evidence from the National Sample Surveys*' the author, Jayati Ghosh has discussed the actual extent of marginalisation and discrimination apparently faced by different categories in the population. 'It is to be noted that gender gaps were very marked and typically even higher than differences across social category, so that women among the socially deprived categories were the most highly discriminated even in terms of literacy. In rural areas, gender gaps in enrolment in higher education remain very high and dominate over social category gaps, although the latter gaps are also very large. Among rural women, the gaps across social category do not appear to be very large, further emphasising the point that gender gaps dominate in enrolment in higher education in rural areas, and that young women are the most discriminated against regardless of social group.' [Ghosh, 2008].

In their paper entitled '*Girls' higher education in India on the road to inclusiveness: on track but heading where?*' Sahni and Shankar have studied the state of Maharashtra and brought to light the systemic side of impediments that have remained less explored in comparison with the cultural-attitudinal biases that have plagued girls' participation to higher education in India. They have highlighted some interesting points based on impact of location, caste and gender based reservations on access to education. Quotas do form a definite channel for female entry into professional courses (where their enrolments have been low so far). But the way girls actually tap this system, as quantified in terms of utilization of quotas, would determine their entry into professional courses rather than the mechanism by itself.

Higher Education in India: India is classified as a country of young people. Demographically nearly 51% of India's population is under the age of 25 and 66% is under the age of 35 years. Such a young population is considered a boon and an asset for any country. Generally called a demographic dividend, it is believed that a young population can drive socio-economic growth. However in order to get advantage of this demographic dividend it is essential that they are trained and educated properly. An illiterate and poorly trained population cannot deliver any benefit to the country. The role of education is thus critical.

The Government of India has consistently tried to promote the growth of the education sector. Today India has the third largest higher education of the world. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the number of Universities/University-level institutions has increased 18 times from 27 in 1950 to 504 in 2009. The sector boasts of 42 Central universities, 243 State universities, 53 State Private universities, 130 Deemed universities, 33 Institutions of National Importance (established under Acts of Parliament) and five Institutions (established under various State legislations). The number of colleges has also registered manifold increase with just 578 in 1950 growing to be more than 30,000 in 2011. There are about 2,565 women's colleges in the country. The numbers speak a lot about the thrust given to this sector. However there is always a quantity versus quality debate, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. We will therefore concentrate on the access that women have to these institutions and how has it brought about a change in their socio-economic status.

Higher Education System in Rajasthan: Rajasthan is the largest state of India and came into existence after the State Reorganization Act was passed in 1956. Till then it was divided into 22 princely states governed by different royal families. It has never had a very robust higher education system and at the time of India's independence there was only one university in the state. However in the last sixty years there has been a substantial progress in the field of higher education, as can be seen from the table below:

Number of Tertiary Educational Institutes in the State of Rajasthan

Institutions	Upto 15 th Aug, 1947	As on 1 st Jan. 2006	Increase
Universities	1	22#	21
General Education Colleges	24 (including intermediate colleges)	752*	728
Tertiary Engineering Institutes	1	48**	47
T.T. Colleges	3	Around 260	Around 257
Medical Colleges	1	8	7
Dental Colleges	-	9	9
Nursing and Pharmacy Colleges	-	51	51
Agriculture & Veterinary	1	Around 6	Around 5
Management Institutes (MBA)	-	55***	55
MCA Colleges	-	16	16
Enrollment	12000	Around 4 lakh regular & 2 lakh private students	

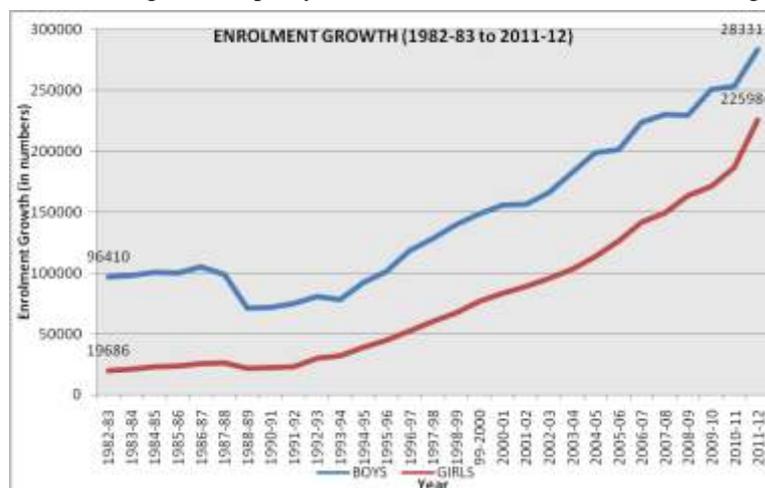
including eight Deemed Universities (four General and four Technical)

* 272 colleges are exclusively for women

** including BITS, Pilani, MNIT Jaipur, LNMIIT Jaipur and MIT Laxmangarh Deemed Universities (technical)

*** Affiliated to Rajasthan Technical University (RTU), admissions are made through Rajasthan Management Aptitude Test (RMAT)

There has been a substantial growth in the enrolment ratio in the state both for boys as well as girls. As can be seen in the graph below the enrolment of boys has increased from just 96,410 in 1982-83 to 2,83,311 in 2011-12. Similarly the enrolment of girls has also increased from a mere 19,686 in 1982-83 to 2,25,984 in 2011-12. But the gender disparity has remained a continuous feature in this growth.



The phenomenal growth in this sector can be attributed to various reasons, one of which can also be government policies. But the question that remains is whether these institutions are providing a platform for social equity and promoting gender equality. What is the situation of women vis-a-vis higher education in the state of Rajasthan.

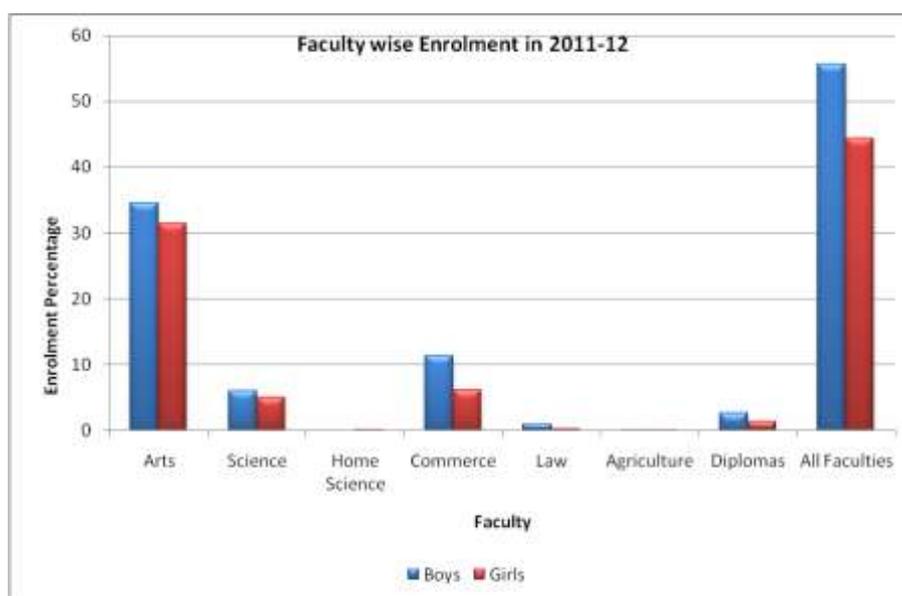
Female Enrollment in Higher Education: A Times of India report in 2012 stated that the number of women students enrolling for higher education in India has shot up, and Kerala stands second in terms of enrolment. Women enrolment in higher education which was less than 10% of the total enrolment on the eve of Independence has risen to 41.5% in the academic year 2010-11. According to a report of the University Grants Commission out of 169.75 lakh students enrolled in higher education in 2010-11, almost 70.49 lakh were women as compared to just about 47.08 lakh women enrolled in 2006-07. Among the states, Goa with 61.2% topped in terms of women enrolment followed by Kerala (56.8%), Meghalaya (51.8%) and Nagaland (50.5%). In rest of the states, the percentage of women enrolled was less than the national average, with Bihar recording the lowest at 31.2%. The majority of women in the country are enrolled in non-professional graduate level courses, with 41.21% of the women enrolled in the Arts stream, followed by 19.14% in the faculty of Science and 16.12% in Commerce and Management. The number of women enrolled in faculty of Education was 4.60%, medicine was 3.85% and in engineering technology in 2010-11 was 11.36%. Women enrolment in the faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Science has been miniscule. The enrolment position of women students enrolled for Master's level courses has been 12% while a very small proportion, that's 0.8% of the total number of students had been enrolled for research. Similarly, only one per cent of the total number of students had been enrolled in diploma or certificate courses.

Women in Disadvantaged Groups: Despite the numbers mentioned above, women in the disadvantaged groups often find it more difficult to get access to education. Hence their enrollment ratios are generally less than the national average. For example, in 2006-07, the proportion of Scheduled Caste students was 11.8 per cent (4.2 per cent women, 7.6 per cent men) and Scheduled Tribe students were 4.5 per cent (1.7 per cent women, 3.8 per cent men). They generally join general education courses and are denied access to elite/courses and institutions. Proportionately and numerically access is very limited to them as a whole but more so to the women from these groups. For instance, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women comprised 10.1 per cent and 4.4 per cent, respectively of all women enrolled in 2006-07 in higher education (GoI, 2007: 26).

The Rajasthan Picture: The state of Rajasthan also mirrors the national trend in terms of gender disparity in higher education. The overall enrollment ratio for women is less than that for men. If we examine the distribution faculty-wise, we can see that the difference in the enrollment ratio among boys and girls is least in the discipline of Arts but most in the commerce discipline. The enrollment ratio of Home Science reflects the social biases prevalent. There is a marked difference in the enrollment ratios of boys and girls in areas of agriculture and law. Even in the diploma courses the boys have an edge over girls.

Faculty wise enrollment in 2011-12

Faculty	Enrollment 2011-12			Percent of Total		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Arts	175817	159951	335768	34.52	31.41	65.93
Science	30858	25309	56167	6.06	4.97	11.03
Home Science	0	777	777	0.00	0.15	0.15
Commerce	57910	31343	89253	11.37	6.15	17.52
Law	4837	1443	6280	0.95	0.28	1.23
Agriculture	532	164	696	0.10	0.03	0.14
Diplomas	13357	6997	20354	2.62	1.37	4.00
Total	283311	225984	509295	55.63	44.37	100.00



The above table gives us an idea of the difference in enrollment ratios amongst boys and girls across various disciplines or faculties. One can see that the more market oriented courses or faculties which have greater perceived employment generation capabilities have less females. This means that by not being enrolled in such courses, the participation of women in the workforce will be limited. Therefore a substantial benefit of education will be denied to them, despite them having a degree.

Category & Gender wise Enrolment in 2011-12 (PG Courses)

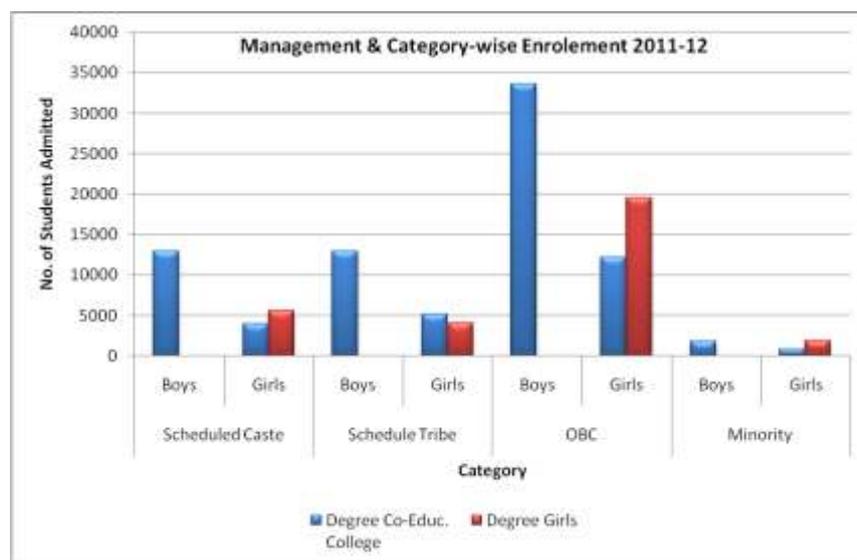
	Scheduled Caste		Schedule Tribe		OBC		Minority		Other Cast		Total	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
PG & Co-Education	80.4	19.6	77.3	22.7	79.2	20.8	80.8	19.2	72.5	27.5	77.5	22.5
PG Girls	0	100	0	100	0	100	0	100	0	100	0	100

*All data in Percentage

Poor industrialization of Rajasthan has also prevented enrollment of women in vocational courses (engineering, management, computer science, etc.); because of lack of employment opportunities near their homes; and parents unwillingness to send daughters far for work.

These discriminations are further magnified when we look at the data across various caste groups. Amongst Scheduled Castes there is a substantial difference in the enrollment ratio of boys and girls which gets worse at the post graduation level. The same trend can be seen across other sections of ST, OBC and Minority population. Even in the other castes the enrollment ratio of girls is less than that of boys. The above table indicates that the number of girls in co-educational institutes at both degree and post graduate level is far less as compared to boys

- ❖ Reasons could be:
- ❖ Societal Concerns: Unwillingness of parents to send girls where boys are also studying
- ❖ Lack of Infrastructure, such as girls' hostels, inhibiting girls from out of district to come and study
- ❖ Gender insensitive environment of Co-education colleges



There has been an uneven growth of institutions of higher learning throughout the state. In terms of distribution of colleges, out of 272 women colleges, 226 are situated in 14 districts (14 district have more than 5 girls college in their jurisdiction) and remaining 18 districts have only 46 colleges.

Policy Evolution:

Indian governments have seen education as a crucial development tool. Following Independence, school curricula were thus imbued with the twin themes of inclusiveness and national pride, placing emphasis on the fact that India's different communities could live peacefully side by side as one nation. Subsidized quality higher education through institutions such as the IITs and IIMs formed a major contribution to the Nehruvian vision of a self-reliant and modern Indian state. In addition, policies of positive discrimination in education and employment furthered the case for access by hitherto unprivileged social groups to quality education.

The Kothari Commission (1964–6) was set up to formulate a coherent education policy for India. To achieve this, the main pillar of Indian education policy was to be free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. Other features included the development of languages (Hindi, Sanskrit, regional languages and the three-language formula²), equality of educational opportunities (regional, tribal and gender imbalances to be addressed) and the development and prioritization of scientific education and research.

In 1986, Rajiv Gandhi announced a new education policy, the National Policy on Education (NPE), which was intended to prepare India for the 21st century. Various schemes like Operation Blackboard, National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education and District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) were launched with the intention to increase access to education.

These policies have shown mixed results. On the one hand enrollment ratios have increased and literacy rates have improved but on the other hand the participation of women in the mainstream is still minimal.

Policy Interventions:

1. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB): The government of Rajasthan introduced gender responsive budgeting as a tool to further women's empowerment and gender equity in the state. GRB in education serves to assess how effectively the services of the Government are meeting the needs of women and girls, in relation to the men; how much the policies are focused towards women; and how much of the expenditure of the State in education is reaching the women.

2. Government Expenditure: Expenditure of the State on girls' education reflects the disparities in enrollments; for the various levels of education, between 13.37 to 44.65% of the total expenditure is spent on girls' education. The highest percentage of

expenditure on girls is seen in Primary education (44.65%), and the lowest is seen in ITI's and Polytechnic's (13.37%).

3. Affirmative Actions: The policy of affirmative action has been in place in the Indian Government for a long time. However a bigger question is that improvement in access does not necessarily ensure parity in participation and outcomes. Compensatory or positive discrimination policies have been largely with reference to caste identities and not gender specific. However there are some policies specifically aimed at promoting women in the field of higher education.

4. In an effort to promote girls' education among minorities, the State Government has decided to completely waive interest on loans obtained by girl students for higher and technical education. Besides, girls' hostels are being established at all divisional headquarters in phases.

Recommendations:

After examining the literature and factual data for the state, the following recommendations have been made:

- ❖ Strong need to open more 'all-girls' colleges. This is give confidence to parents to send their daughters for higher education, and help them withstand societal pressures.
- ❖ Establishment of physical infrastructure, such as girls' hostels in prominent centers of learning. Safe accommodation is one of the major requirements of girls and its lack can act as a major hindrance in their ambitions to pursue higher education.
- ❖ Gender sensitivity training at all levels to remove attitudinal barriers
- ❖ Positive discriminatory steps, such as 33% reservation for women does help in encouraging parents to send their daughters for higher education, so the government needs to ensure that the implementation of such schemes is done in the right spirit.
- ❖ Government Expenditure: The highest percentage of expenditure on girls is seen in Primary education (44.65%), and the lowest is seen in ITI's and Polytechnic's (13.37%). There is a need to spend more money on higher education, particularly vocational training courses. Higher education is strongly linked to economic independence and if girls are encouraged to take up education that will fetch them jobs, more and more families will send their daughters for tertiary level education. Hence government needs to increase expenditure in providing technical and vocational courses to women.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, it can be said that the aim of government policy should not be just to increase the enrolment ratio but also to ensure that the goals of higher education are achieved. Women should be imparted such education that will make them more aware of their rights and give them economic independence. They should be able to pursue education that has market value and will help them get good jobs. Not only will this secure their economic independence but will also inspire other parents to send their daughters to similar courses.

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