



Research Article

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# Statistical Survey of Women in Higher Education in India



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## Abstract

Education in the empowerment and the freedom for excellence for the male society is obvious for the whole world. Notwithstanding, the role of education for the half of the population of the women folk is lagging behind. It is especially more concern when talks in the sense of women from marginalized section of society, their empowerment, status, position in the society and the role of education in the higher and other strata of educational field. The present scenario witnesses a decent number of women from marginalized section are in the higher education. The scholarship or financial support and the support of the family are like a catalyst in bringing the change in the status and position of women in society through the promotion of education. The current paper is intended to statistically address and analyze the role of education in bringing out the importance of women and their position especially in the marginalized and minority section of Indian society.

**Keywords:** Empowerment; Status; Higher education; Sachar committee report

## Introduction

The country like India has a rich and glorious tradition of higher education since ancient times. The universities occupy a special place in the history of higher education. The basic structure, shape and ethos of the Indian higher educational system and educational policy were clearly subordinate to imperial economic policy and treated the country with profit motive [1]. The new universities were merely foreign transplants. The intention behind the establishment of these universities was not true copies of the original i.e., London, Oxford, Cambridge and the Indian universities could only succeeded in borrowing the outward structure but lacked in adopting the inner spirit of the original system Universities. India after 1947 realized that university education was essential for a cultural resurgence and for meeting the scientific, technical and other manpower requirements of the newly independent nation. Independence brought with it a huge rise in the social demand for higher education. The early 1990s brought about radical changes in attitudes and approaches towards higher education. The economic reform policies of the 1990s created an environment conducive to the rapid growth of private universities in the country and the number increased to 90 by 2011.

Under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-12) it was realized that the pendulum had swung too far away from higher education. The government, thus, launched a plan for massive expansion, which includes establishing central universities,

undergraduate college, research centers etc. The spread of higher education, however, has been very uneven geographically and supplanted the pre-colonial indigenous system with a new system, language, curricula and purpose. The importance of women as a male counterpart and substantial human resource was taken seriously. Thus, focus was given to involve women as equal partners in Universities, colleges and various institutes in India. They have indeed made significant strides during the past six decades entering every field of education, and taking on the challenge of various professions. However, masses of women still remain restricted by the vicious circles social stereotypes and stigma. Women from different socio-economic strata have a great deal of disparity in their life-situations. There are also significant differences in women's specific status across regions, caste and class, communities and religions. Status of women is also determined by the developmental status of the area [2].

It's often assumed in India that the purposes of a university education are far narrower than those of primary and secondary education. The education on offer is typically much more narrowly focused than secondary education, and its connection to future employment tighter [3]. In the current study the authors focus over the brief historical ups and downs in the field of development of higher education in the educational history of India till the present time. The study addresses the educational and working status of in women general and marginalized and

minority women in particular. However, the data incorporated regarding the status of women from marginalized and minority section of society in the study is lesser available than the male counterparts from the same section in particular and male in general.

### Methodology

The current study is based on the secondary sources. The statistical data has been selected from various sources of earlier studies. The data has been explored to assess the actual condition of women presence in higher education, missing link and focus of participation of minority women candidates in the higher education.

### Objective

The objective of the current study is to look after the presence of women in higher education especially from the minority community.

### Constitutional provisions

Women, in the present time, are considered as the potential resource in the development of community and state. The half-of-the population needs to be safeguarded from different dimensions. The education of women have been emphasized at the family and State level by the Constitution of India. The following are the Articles under Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). The commissions have exclusively been established for the cause of women by the Government of India. The Constitution of India provides certain safeguards for the protection of women's rights. These Constitutional provisions are intended for the well-being and all round development of women of all the communities. Our laws are not gender discriminatory and are equally applicable both to males and females. There is no denying the fact about gender equality. However, the practice of gender discrimination is not hidden from any one. Keeping in mind the Constitution framers provided affirmative action in favour of women. The Articles are underlined below:

**Article 15(3)** - makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discrimination in favour of women.

**Article 51A** - (k) in part IV-A makes it a duty of or a guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of 6 and 14 years.

**Article 39(a)** - states that the State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.

**Article 45** - (amended in 2002) gives a directive to the State to provide early childhood care and education for all children till they attain the age of six years.

From the above mentioned articles we infer that it tell about the responsibilities of parents about education towards their children and the accountability of State to take affirmative

action in favour of women, formulate policies for all on equal footage including women, and providing early childhood care and education till they reach up to the age of six years. Thus, the idea is to enable child to strengthen their basic development in education to lead the path of higher education and live like a potential and contributory citizen of India. The institutions have also been established to safeguard the interest of women. These are the following commissions for the protection and safeguard of the interest of women.

### National commission for women

The national Commission for women (NCW), a statutory body set up in 1992, safeguards the rights and interests of women.

### Ministry of women and child development

The Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal agency for all matters pertaining to the welfare, development and empowerment of women and children in the country and is responsible for the formulation and implementation of women specific programmes in different areas. Religion acts as an important cultural factor, which reinforces the traditional perception of woman as subordinate to males and under male control. The unequal position of women in the family is determined and reinforced by the dictates of the organised religion. None of the major religions-Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity ever conceded complete equality to women and have in fact institutionalised the secondary position of women versus men through written and oral interpretations. Women belonging to the same religion might yet have very different conditions of life, which are influenced by their earning capacity, employment, rural-urban setup, educational level, and so on. Within every minority groups, some women subsist below the poverty line (BPL), while others enjoy a higher standard of living. However, the case is same here with regards to the treatment of women, the Constitution treats women as equal citizens of the state but the practices in society are quite different. Meaning by the religion and the Constitution calls for equal treatment, and division of labour but practices in society make it difficult to realise.

### Age-sex composition of muslim population

For the first time the 2001 census made available tabulations on age by religion and Muslims show a relatively younger age distribution which is notably different from the general population (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Age-Sex Distribution of Muslim Population, India, 2001 (Percentage).

Age Group	Male	Female
0-4	12.4	12.7
5-9	14.7	14.7
10-14	14	13.7
15-19	10.8	10.1

20-24	8.7	8.6
25-29	7.2	7.8
30-34	6.3	6.7
35-39	6.1	6.3
40-44	4.9	4.5
45-49	3.9	3.8
50-54	3.1	2.7
55-59	2	2.3
60-64	2.1	2.2
65+	3.5	3.8
Age not stated	0.3	0.2
Total	100	100

**Source: Computed from data CDs from census India, registrar general (2005) quoted in SCR (2006)**

The minority sections especially Muslims are at a double disadvantage with low levels of education combined with low quality education. In addition, their deprivation increases manifold as the level of education rises. The statement is about the condition of Muslim’s education as a whole rather do not talk about the bifurcation of education of Muslim males and females. The present status shall be looked in terms of constitutional safeguards so as to clear the picture more.

**Educational level**

The following Table shows the educational level of different Communities, Castes and Tribes (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Census 2001.

S.No.	Community/Castes	Women		
		Up to Primary Level	Secondary Level	Senior Secondary Level
1	All Religions	75.77	12.5	5.9
2	Hindus	75.6	12.51	5.95
3	Muslims	87.97	9.53	3.85
4	Christians	60.76	17.19	9.47
5	Sikhs	55.95	18.75	7.38
6	Buddhists	79.31	12.55	6.28
7	Jains	42.52	20.73	12.76
8	Other Religions	92.5	9.36	3.6
9	Scheduled Castes	85.9	7.66	3.49
10	Scheduled Tribes	89.39	6	2.45

**Source: Census 2001**

The data shows that Muslims up to Primary level does have remarkable presence even above the percentage of Hindus, the majority community, and Christians, minority community. However, both the majority Hindu and minority Christian community excel at the secondary level of education. The Muslims at senior secondary level has fallen down gravely. This shows some reason behind the lowering down of Muslim participation in education. The data, however, does not include the percentage of Muslims at higher level of education. The table also does not demarcate the presence of women from the minority Muslims at any of the level. The declining trend of participation of Muslims in education through the above mentioned table indicates the lower presence of women in higher education form the same minority section. As Basant and others expressed that the inability of certain marginalized segments to achieve higher education eligibility may be due to the unequal access to school education. Banerjee & Somanathan analyze the census data between 1971 and 1991, and find that unequal access to primary schools has been a major factor in creating disparities among different caste groups [4].

If the pattern of economic rewards and social prestige associated with higher education-based professions (relative

to the rest of society) does not change drastically, it seems reasonable to suppose that the number of aspirants who wish to enter such fields will not decline and is likely to rise. In combination with what has been said above, this leads logically to the conclusion that higher education will necessarily remain a selective or elite sector. In other words, there will always be a funnel effect here - more will want to get in than can be accommodated, so at least some and probably very many will have to be turned away. The important point is that this is true and will remain more or less true even if India miraculously turns into a rich and overdeveloped nation tomorrow [5]. There can be no debate on the need to provide universal, good-quality education up to the secondary level for all of our population. There are huge inadequacies in government school infrastructure (with an inadequate number of schools, nearly one-fifth of rural schools operating without any building at all and another one-fifth functioning with only one classroom and one teacher for up to five classes [6]. Literacy levels are expectedly higher for males than for females-75.3% against 53.7%. Literacy is also in urban areas (79.9%) than in rural areas (58.7%). This gap of about 20 percentage points between rural and across gender has been a persistent feature of Indian society over the last two decades despite the increase in literacy levels during this period [7]. Muslims from minority community in urban areas,

especially Muslim women, have a larger literacy deficit vis-a-vis the average condition prevailing in the state.

**Role of union and state governments**

The roles of the Union and State governments sometimes clash with each other in case of higher education. Universities are in the state list of the Constitution, requiring the states to be involved in policy-making, planning, administration and overall development of higher education. At the same time, 'coordination and determination of standards in higher education' is a function of the Union government.

**Inequity and gender difference**

A serious problem in the higher education system is a very high degree of inequity-between different social groups, between men and women, between rural and urban areas, and between the rich and the poor. Gender differences have narrowed down over the years to a substantial extent. Currently about 40 percent of the enrolments are women, though there is a concentration of them in some areas of study. But this is changing, though slowly. First of all, in like primary education, healthcare or similar 'basic needs', higher education is not a matter of right, leave alone a fundamental right. No person of any caste or community has a right to become a doctor, engineer or other kind of highly educated person. Everyone has the right to aspire to such status and to fair and equal consideration in the admissions process, according to specified norms of fairness and equality. But no one has a priori right to actual admission. The aspect of gender difference does not confine to the walls of households. This is evident from the very foundations of even the old and reputed Universities of India. The recent incident of eve-teasing in one of the higher level educational Universities in India, exemplify the prevalent feeling of gender difference even at the higher level of educational set-ups. The women students at educational institutions encounter the discouraging phenomenon which causes them to remain at the backstage in higher education.

**Declining quality education**

It is widely felt that the quality and standards of higher education are rapidly declining. According to a sample survey of universities and colleges only five of 18 central universities and 33 of 121 state universities received an A grade from the NAAC. The inadequacy of public funds is a very serious problem that the higher education system in India suffers from. It is related to many of the issues mentioned, including falling standards and quality; widening inequalities; the growth in private institutions-specifically profit-seeking ones; the introduction of self-financing courses, even in the best universities; and the increasing reliance on student fees and loans as well as other cost recovery measures.

**International pressures**

Rapidly changing national and global socio-economic, political and technological conditions, the emergence of domestic and international market forces, privatization, the revolution in information and communications technology, and the powerful

waves of globalization, internationalization and corporatization exert multiple pressures on the system, adding to the gravity of the problems.

**Market - oriented higher education**

It is indisputable that the liberal economic reforms introduced in the 1990s have had a serious impact on various dimensions of higher education. The whole educational milieu has changed. To put it briefly, the development paradigm has changed from that based on a welfare state philosophy to a market-oriented one-to a less state-regulated and more liberalized economic regime. This affects the development of almost every dimension of higher education. Higher education in India today is in a state of ferment; it faces tremendous challenges and the answers are not clear. Answers, if any, they are not simple. In India, a significant proportion of the relevant population still remains deprived of the benefits of higher education, and the minority Muslims comprise an important category of the deprived communities. According to Census data, while only about 7 per cent of the population aged 20 years and above are graduates or hold diplomas, this proportion is less than 4 percent amongst minority Muslim community. Besides, those having technical education at the appropriate ages (18 years and more) are as low as one percent and amongst Muslims, that is almost non-existent. With marketization of education, there is need to take self-initiative by the minority communities especially Muslims [8] (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Overall Literacy and Female Literacy Rate.

Religion, Community/Castes	Overall Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate
All India	64.84	53.67
Hindu	65.09	53.21
Muslim	59.13	50.09
Christian	80.25	76.19
Sikh	69.45	63.09
Buddhist	72.66	61.69
Jain	94.08	90.58
Other religions	47.02	33.19
Scheduled Castes	54.7	41.9
Scheduled Tribes	47.1	34.76

Table 3 demonstrates that minority Muslims are just above the Scheduled Castes in overall literacy rate and female literacy rate. The data, however, is unable to show the quality of education, percentage of Muslim women in higher education. The concern regarding the quality of education is significant because of the truth that the nation lacks in providing quality education. It also does not indicate the level of education among the women. The percentage of women in literacy rate itself talks about the work that is half done. The data regarding the level of education, the percentage of literacy rate of a community and the percentage

of a particular community in achieving literacy to a certain level does not refer that the value education is being acquired by the

person. The percentage of professional education has also not been fulfilled by the available data (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Graduates and Diploma Holders by SRCs.

SRCs	Number (in lakhs)		Percentage of 20 years + Population		Distribution Across SRCs	
	Graduate	Diploma and Certificate	Graduates	Diploma and Certificate	Graduates	Diploma and Certificate
Total	376.7	40.5	6.7	0.7	100	100
Muslim	23.9	2.7	3.6	0.4	6.3	6.8
SCs/STs	30.8	4.1	2.4	0.3	8.2	10.2
All others	322	33.7	8.8	0.9	85.5	83

**Census 2001**

The data shows the percentage of acquiring graduate, diploma and certificate in lakhs, percentage of graduate, diploma and certificate of people above 20 years, and in different SRCs. The percentage of 3.6 for Muslims is too meagre. This is only for Muslim population. The data does not include the percentage of Muslim women out of the total. We, however, on the available data can infer that the status of women in higher education is much lower than the total meagre percentage of Muslim education. For Indian Muslims, education is not in the list of priority. This is the last priority of life in the list of priority if we see the 70 percent of Indian Muslims [9] (Table 5).

**Table 5:** Graduate as Proportion of Population by Age Groups-All India, 2004-05.

Age Group	Hindus			Muslims	Other Minorities
	Gen	OBCs	SCs/STs		
20-30 years	18.6	6.5	3.3	4.5	11.6
30-40 years	16.8	4.6	2.3	3.3	9.2
40-50 years	14.6	3.2	1.5	2.8	8.1
51 years & above	9.8	1.9	0.9	2.1	5.7
Total	15.3	4.4	2.2	3.4	8.9

**Source: Estimated from NSSO (2004-05) 61st round, SCH.10**

Despite a better success rate Muslims constitute only 1.3% of studying in all courses in all IIMs in India, and in absolute number they were only 63 from out of 4743. In the case of the IITs, out

of 27, 161 students enrolled in the different programmes, they are only 894 Muslims (SCR, 2006, p. 68-69). The enrolment of Muslims in the regular stream of science, arts and commerce courses represents that only one out of every fifty students in Post-Graduate (PG) courses is a Muslim. The share of Muslims in all courses is low, particularly at the PG level, and marginal in the science stream. However, it is interesting that the enrolment ratio is higher among girls than boys in UG courses. At the PG level, however, this proportion falls except in arts courses. The share of Muslims enrolled in MBA courses was found to be only one percent among both boys and girls. While the data is not sufficient to come to any conclusion, it is consistent with the collected from the IIMs. The representation of Muslims in the top Medical colleges is only marginally better. It is about 4% of students enrolled in all courses. Most of them are studying at the UG level namely in MBBS, Dental, Nursing etc [10,11].

The representation of Muslims in other courses is marginal. Except in PG Diploma courses, the percentage of Muslim girls is lower than Muslim boys in all courses. The proportion of Muslim students in the UG courses is about 9% lower than their share in the population. Muslims are more likely to be located in science and commerce streams followed by arts. The status of Muslims in PG courses is equally disappointing. Only about one out of twenty students is a Muslim. However, Muslim students typically tend to seek professional courses, followed by commerce; in terms of absolute numbers and relative share they are at the bottom amongst the SRCs. The data however, shows the presence of Muslims at different strata of educational standards but it does not presents the data related to the ration of women in these institutions and respective courses. This aspect need to be explored in further researches (Table 6).

**Table 6:** Incidence of Graduation and those Pursuing Post Graduate studies among the graduate and post graduate poor and non-poor Muslims, 2004-05.

SRCs	20-30 years old persons			Graduates	Attending PG courses		
	Percentage to Population		Distribution Across SRCs		Percentage of Graduates in the Age Group		Distribution Across SRCs
Non-Poor	Muslims	71.2	11.4	4.9	6.8	22.9	6.4
Poor	Muslims	28.8	15.7	1.2	10.5	16.3	7

**Source: SCR, 2006**

While the education system appears to have given up on Muslim girls, the girls themselves have not given up on education. There is a strong desire and enthusiasm for education among Muslim women and girls across the board. This was one of the most striking pieces of information the Committee gathered in its interactions in the different states. The current research

**Table 7:** Education of Muslims at different Levels.

Religion/Community	Up to Primary level	Middle	Secondary	Senior Sec.	Diploma	Graduation	Unclassified
Muslims	65.31	15.14	10.96	4.53	0.41	3.6	0.05

**Source: Census 2001**

On analyzing the distribution of literates by educational level, it was found that Jains (21.47 percent) have the highest proportion of educated persons among all the religions among those who have completed graduation stage. Muslims out of the total population of minority groups have the lowest proportion at 3.6 percent (Table 8) [12].

**Table 8:** Work Participation Rate of Muslim Males and Females.

Muslim	
Male	47.5
Female	14.1
Average	31.3

**Census of India, 2001**

Thus, the work participation rate among Muslim women has been found to be low affecting the quality of their life.

**Conclusion**

In the last 60 years, the women’s status has received a lot of attention as reflected in the national policies, plans, programmes and schemes resulting in advancement of women in all fields. Besides, special committees and commissions on women have been set up from time to time resulting in policy changes and setting up of institutional structures for implementing programmes and schemes. The Indian women appear to have come a long way from an obscurantist past and complete subordination to a position where theoretically they are the equals of men and there is a vast array of laws, policies, and programmes trying to contend with the cumulative disadvantage of women arising out of the predominant patriarchal family and kinship structures, customs, traditions, and beliefs. Women are marking a mark in all fields among the middle classes and the elite. Yet at the level of reality, the promise of equality and dignity remains an unfinished agenda.

The Muslims women are also struggling hard to excel in the fields of education, employment, sports and business. The educated class among the Muslims are making a difference with regard to the right of female education. The financial support from the side of government for the promotion of higher

education also facilitates the presence of Muslim women in the institutes of higher education. The establishment of private educational institutions and employment opportunities in the same also attracts the Muslim women towards education and the higher education in particular. Yet, a lot of societal and situational factors are in the way of enhancing the presence of women in higher education especially the marginalized Muslim women. The Hindu Upper Castes are heavily over-represented among the highly educated, some other castes and communities have got to be under-represented.

There is undeniable fact that, more than half a century after the formal adoption of a constitution, the dominance of the Hindu UCs in Indian higher education is still substantial, while the lower castes and Muslims are significantly under-represented. However, the existence of inequality and discrimination may be necessary but it is not sufficient to prove the existence of injustice. Most people believe, for example, that those who work more should be paid more, and vice-versa; i.e., they believe in unequal pay for unequal work. The irony with the Muslims irrespective of male or females is that both have been kept under inclusive category of safeguard meaning by Muslims as backward class has been put under the OBC category with the majority community on the one hand and the Muslim women under the category of Women including Hindus and other minority community on the other hand.

This develops lesser focus over the causes and issues exclusively of minority Muslim community. As the minority community will be kept along with the category of majority community in terms of reservations the competition will be high and the important positions will remain in lesser number in the hands of the minority Muslim community. The issues of Muslims in general and women in particular will, as a result, receive lesser attention and sometimes neglected in favour of their own benefits. Deshpande was of the opinion that the higher education is biased against the poor, and against the lower castes or other groups who suffer from social disadvantages in society. This is true in developed countries as well, but is more starkly relevant in countries like India. The findings of Sachar Committee also mentioned that in some instances the relative share for Muslims is lower than even the SCs who are victims of a long standing

caste system. Such relative deprivation calls for a significant policy shift, in the recognition of the problem and in devising corrective measures, as well as in the allocation of resources. The findings of such committees have been implemented. The reports have been treated as another bundle of research documents. The Government seems to be waiting for another century to assess the further deep rooted marginalization of minorities before taking any concrete action for the actual upliftment of minorities. The limited availability of data about the educational status of women especially the minority Muslim women in higher education is one of the findings of the current study.

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