

## **Participation of Women in Higher Education: The Indian Perspective**

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During the last six decades since independence, there has been phenomenal development of education system in India resulting in the creation of one of the largest education systems of the world. After independence, higher education sector attracted greater attention of the native government than elementary and secondary education sectors. University Education Commission (1948), the first commission in education set up by the government of free India, laid special emphasis on the education of women and recommended that in view of the similar fields of activity for men and women and some specific requirements of women maximum facilities should be given for education in Home Economics and Home Management. Higher education was recognized as a powerful instrument of socioeconomic advancement of the society in general and a vehicle for upward social mobility for deprived and marginalized sections in particular. Now, India has third largest higher education system of the world, but it is accessible only to 12% of the youth in the age-group 18-24 years. The deprived sections of the society, especially women, have had limited access to higher education. In this paper, the author has analyzed gender-based educational disparities among various social sections with special reference to caste and religious affiliations. The author has discussed and evaluated the current status of participation of women in higher education selected educationally backward sections in respect of their participation in higher education in order to assess the effectiveness of compensatory measures taken by the central and state governments to address the gender-based issues in higher education. Government of India has been making concerted efforts since independence for bridging the socioeconomic gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups, but still these sections have remained behind the mainstream society though there has been considerable relative improvement. Education, especially higher, has been recognized as a great equalizer and a powerful tool of upward social mobility capable of being used for reducing socioeconomic disparities and building an inclusive society. The purpose of this article is to: (i) Analyze gender-based educational disparities among various social sections with reference to caste and religious affiliation. (ii) Discuss and evaluate the current status of women from selected educationally backward sections in terms of their participation in higher education. (iii) Assess the effectiveness of compensatory measures taken by the central and state governments to address the gender-based issues in higher education.