

Women's Participation in Indian Higher Education

Shilpi Das¹, Doyel Karmakar^{2*}, Dr. Lalit Lalitav Mohakud³, Santosh Mahato⁴

ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental right for everyone, including women. In recent years, women's participation in higher education has increased significantly, indicating development toward gender equality. However, disparities persist due to societal norms and cultural issues. Consequently, researching women's involvement in higher education is essential for understanding these challenges and finding solutions. This article compares female enrollment ratios across various streams and examines male versus female enrollment across different modes. The data, sourced from the AISHE report last published in 2022, covers the years 2018 to 2022. The result showed that women's enrolment in higher education in India has improved significantly over the years. In several streams, women's enrolment has increased steadily compared to men. However, disparities still exist in some professional courses. For the development of our country, women's participation in higher education is essential. Sustained policy support, social change, and collective efforts by government, institutions, and society are crucial to boost women's enrolment in higher education and promote national development.

Keywords: *Women's Education, Higher Education, Women's Participation, Women's Enrollment*

It is well established at both national and individual levels that education increases engagement and broadens the range of perspectives (Kumar et al., 2025). In today's world, fair competition and opportunities play a significant role in education by reducing gender disparities (Tomassini, 2021). A strong foundation in women's education is central to this progress. Education is a fundamental right and a powerful tool for women to develop autonomy in discriminatory spheres. It also improves their capacity to acquire knowledge, power, and experience (Lone et al., 2020). Despite considerable progress in education, many women still face barriers to their educational journey due to socio-economic status, cultural norms, and unequal educational quality, which affect the development of necessary modern skills (Tang & Horta, 2022). Women's education is important not only for social equality. A woman is responsible for the entire family, so an educated woman is better able to care for her children and make better decisions, which eventually contribute to the prosperity of her

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

²Research Scholar, Department of Education, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

³Associate Professor of Jadavpur University, Department of Education, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

⁴Research scholar, Department of Education, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: May 07, 2026; Revision Received: May 28, 2026; Accepted: June 02, 2026

Women's Participation in Indian Higher Education

family and society (Priya et al., 2021). In teaching, nursing, and medicine, women have made greater progress than men (Hill & King, 1995). To voice women's needs and concerns, women must be represented in every field. For that, we need a strong educational background, especially a higher education background.

Higher education refers to education pursued after 12 years of schooling. It includes postgraduate, undergraduate, specialised research, and professional training. It bridges academic theory and practice by creating new knowledge and offers society specialised expertise. That knowledge is a powerful tool for personal growth and helps to reboot our society with economic stability. When women access this advanced knowledge, they gain critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which enable confidence, self-worth, and greater life satisfaction and fulfilment (Schuller et al., 2004). Additionally, higher education helps women navigate obstacles and achieve personal goals, and it helps them question and critique gender-specific norms (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Lone et al., 2020). Despite this, women in higher education have come a long way, and the path has not been easy. In the pre-colonial era, education for women existed only in some aristocratic circles. There was also a belief that women did not make monetary contributions, so they did not require education. However, during the colonial era, women's education was introduced, and Indians saw it as a societal reform movement. Even before 1882, women were not allowed to enrol in higher education; since then, several organisations have opened their institutions to women. As a result, in 1941, the female literacy rate rose surprisingly to 7.30, which was 3 times higher than in previous years. After the independent Indian government took different measures to enable women to secure education (Kathiresan, 2022). The literacy rate among women also increased to 54.16%, even though our constitution supports women's higher education. Now, different scholarship programmes, fee reductions, and financial assistance for women from low-income backgrounds in higher education are changing the mindset among women's parents, contributing to the growth of women's education.

Over the years, in-depth analyses, innovative approaches, and fresh discoveries in women's education have given us greater insight, enabling us to effectively address these issues in both personal and professional development (Suminar et al., 2024). Though higher education is recognised as a facilitator of social and personal growth, there are barriers that hinder women's higher education in India, including economic challenges, gender disparities in employment opportunities and income levels, cultural norms and societal expectations, limited investment in girls' education, and the burden of domestic responsibilities (Jamatia, 2023). Recent studies showed that limited resources, unsafe learning environment and gender-based violence in institutions lead to higher dropout, which eventually lowers academic achievements (Zeinali et al., 2021 & Westoby et al., 2021). Therefore, research on women's participation in higher education is becoming crucial for developing a better understanding and seeking solutions to these problems. The ongoing struggle of women in higher education and its importance to society's overall development led the researchers to examine the current state of female enrollment in India. Furthermore, it is essential to compare the status of women in higher education to confront and transform our societal and cultural beliefs so that they empower women to take charge of their education and future. By conducting this research, we can gain insight into the position of women in higher education, and it will also serve as a valuable resource to promote gender equality in higher education.

Women's Participation in Indian Higher Education

Objectives

The objectives of the study are

1. To compare the female enrollment status in various streams.
2. To compare female enrollment status in various castes.
3. To compare the male-female enrollment status in different modes (distance and regular mode).
4. To compare the male-female enrollment status in different streams.

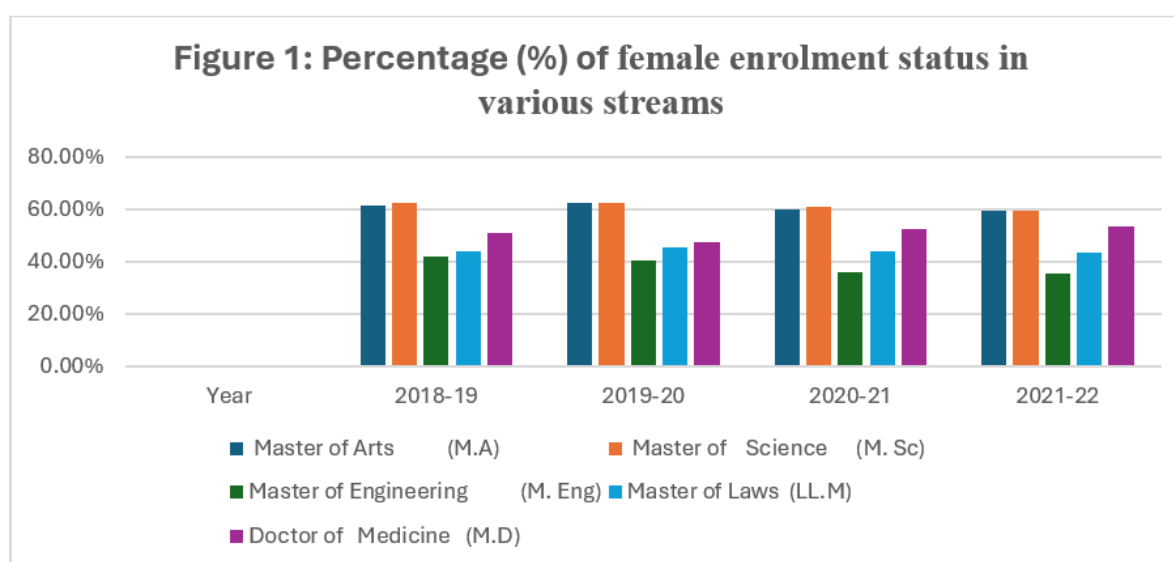
METHODOLOGY

This study examines women's status in higher education in India using a quantitative and descriptive research design. All the data were collected from the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report, free of cost. The data spans four years from 2018-2019 to 2021-2022. This data sheet covers the entire student population enrolled in that particular academic year. So, the extensive data ensures the validity of the research, as the analysis has been conducted on census data rather than sample data. The graphs and tables have been charted using Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the analysis, the researcher considered the enrollment of females in higher education, which was categorised into various streams, namely, enrollment in the Master of Arts (M. A), Master of Science (M. Sc.), Master of Engineering (M.Eng.), Master of Laws (LL.M.), and Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) courses. The following figures show female enrollment in higher education.

1. Female Enrollment Status in Various Streams



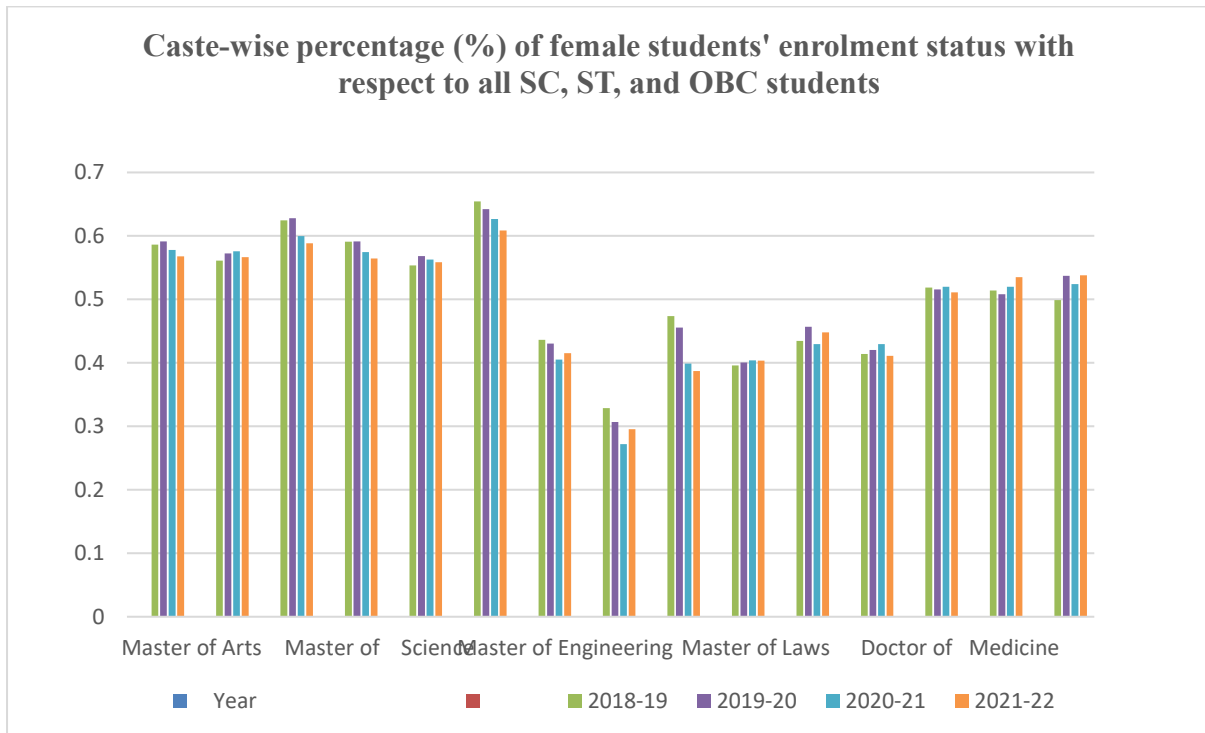
Source: Based on AISHE Reports.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of women's enrolment in higher education in India with respect to all students' enrolment in various streams. Master of Arts (M. A), Master of Science (M. Sc) and Doctor of Medicine (M. D) between the years 2018- 2019 to 2021-2022, the percentage of women's enrolment is significantly higher than the percentage of male enrolment. Despite this growth, some streams still limit the percentage of female enrolment, notably the Master of Engineering (M. Eng) and Master of Laws (LL.M) courses,

Women's Participation in Indian Higher Education

between 2018- 2022. However, Doctor of Medicine in the year 2019-2020 season percentage of female enrolment is also lower than compare to male students' enrolment, due to cultural and economic factors (Kumar et al., 2025) otherwise household related factors- such as ethnicity, family size, income level, geographical location, distance from higher education institutions, etc. play a significant role for low enrolment status of female in higher education (Ghosh & Kundu, 2025).

2. To Compare Female Enrollment Status in Respect to Various Castes



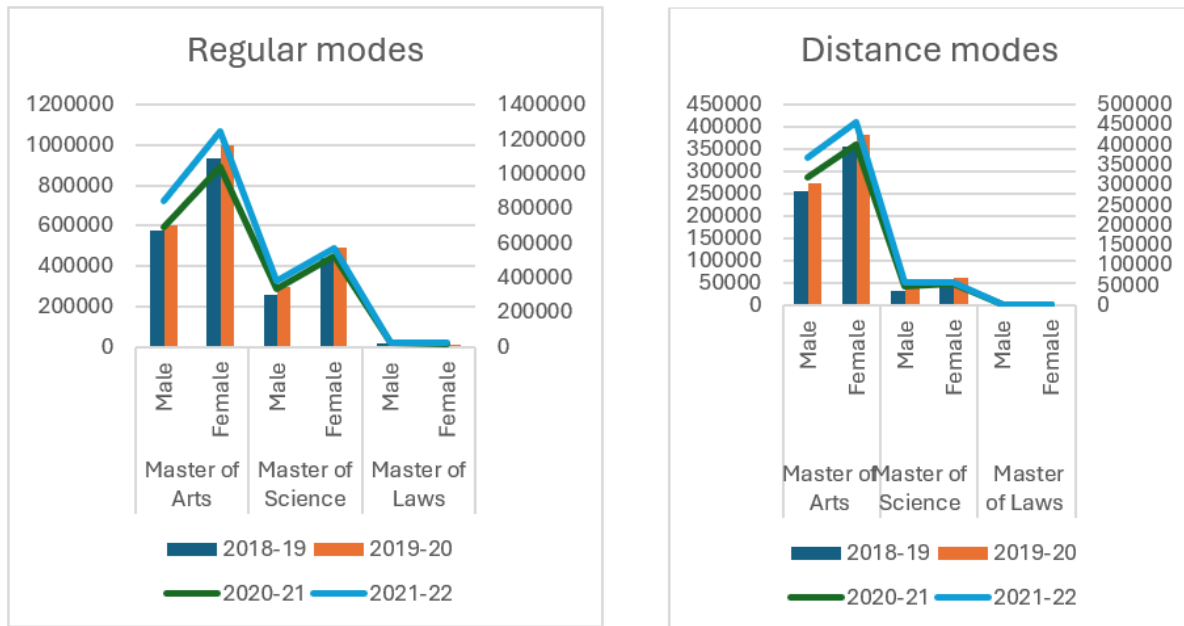
Source: Based on AISHE Reports.

From the Figure 2, It was observed that the all the academic years 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, some streams like, Master of Arts (M. A), Master of Science (M. Sc) and Doctor of Medicine (M. D) course, female enrollment in respect of all SC, ST and OBC student, percentage of female enrolment is higher than percentage of male enrollment. Various awareness programmes, scholarships, reservation policies, and government initiatives have increased access to education for women from the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Kumar et al., 2025). On the other hand, in a few courses, such as the Master of Engineering (M. Eng) and Master of Laws (LL.M), it was found that, across all SC, ST and OBC students, female enrollment is lower than the percentage of male enrollment. Social norms, economic constraints, and early marriage continue to pose significant challenges to the backwardness of women's engagement in higher education (Kumar et al., 2025).

Women's Participation in Indian Higher Education

3. To Compare Male-Female Enrollment Status in Different Modes (Distance and Regular Mode).

Figure 3: (A) and (B) compare the male-female enrolment status in different modes

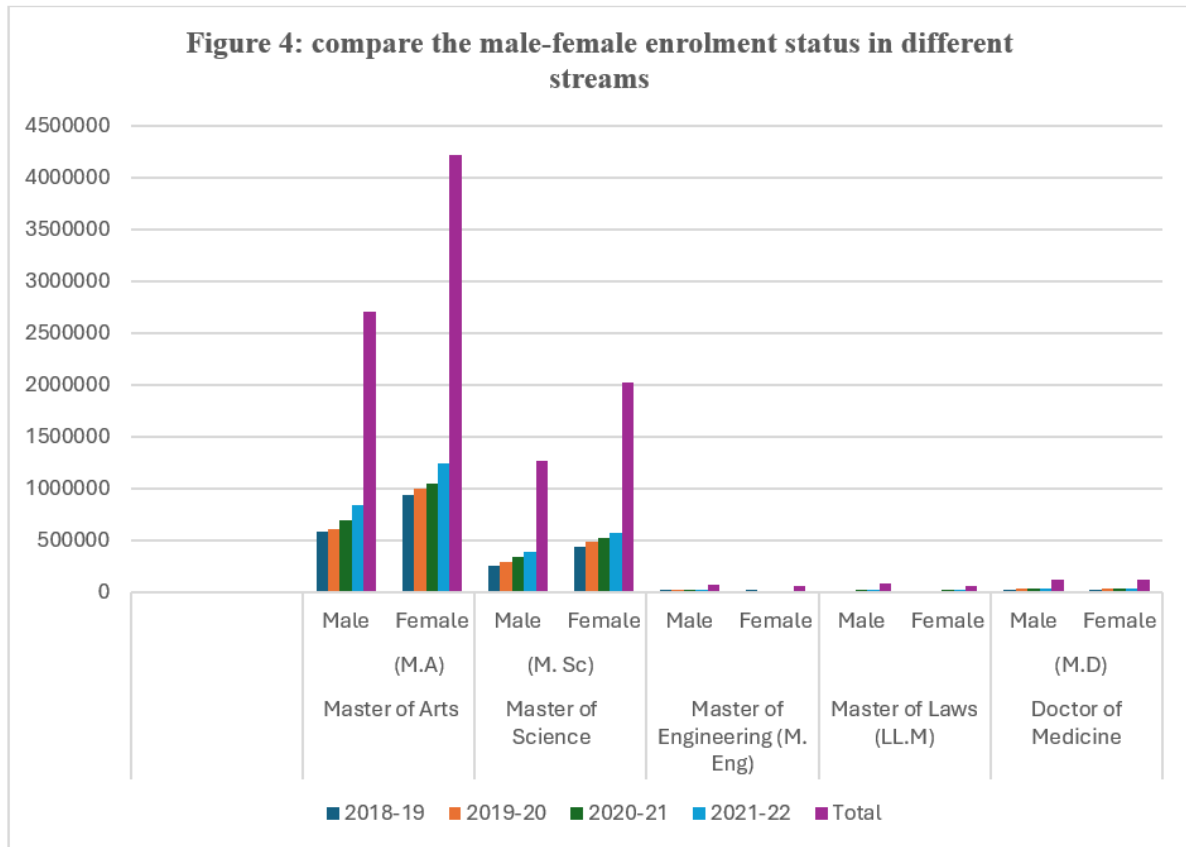


Source: Based on AISHE Reports.

According to Figure 3, (A) found that in regular mode, there were 578198 males and 934616 females enrolled in Master of Arts programs, and on the other hand, Figure 3, (B) in distance mode, 256918 males and 356243 females were enrolled in the 2018-19 academic year. Here, we can see that women have a higher enrolment status than men in both modes. Moreover, based on Figure 3, (A), in regular modes, there were 603337 males and 998712 females enrolled in Master of Arts programs, and on the other hand, in distance mode, 272268 males and 383886 females were enrolled in the 2019-20 academic year. Here, we can also see that women have a higher enrolment status than men in both modes. In the same way, in the academic year 2020-21, in regular modes, 692518 males and 1042225 females were enrolled in Master of Arts programs and on the other hand, in distance mode, 319107 males and 401074 females were enrolled. Here, we can also see that women have a higher enrolment status than men in both modes. In the academic year 2021-22, for the Master of Arts programs, 839700 males and 1245330 females were enrolled in regular modes, and 369406 males and 455303 females were enrolled in distance modes. Equally, we can see that, compared to both modes, women have a higher enrolment rate than men in the M.A. course.

Similarly, in postgraduate courses, the Master of Science across the 2018-2019 to 2021-2022 session, in both modes, regular and distance, female enrollment is significantly higher than male enrollment. However, if we look at the Master of Laws (LL.M.) course, we can see very different results. In Master of Laws courses, both regular and distance modes of male enrollment are significantly higher than female enrollment.

4. To Compare Male-Female Enrollment Status in Different Streams.



Source: Based on AISHE Reports.

According to Figure 4, it was found that, in the academic years 2018-2019 to 2021-2022 season, the total of 2713753 males and 4220883 female students enrolled in the Master of Arts programs (M.A), and, 1272797 male, 2021206 female students enrolled in the Master of Science programs (M. Sc), and 5159 male and 59203 female students enrolled in the Master of Laws streams (LL.M). Similarly, 84426 male and 53519 female students enrolled in Master of Engineering (M. Eng) courses, and 117918 male and 123699 female students enrolled in Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) courses. According to the AISHE report, it was observed from Figure 4 that in the academic years 2018-2019 to 2021-2022 in M.A Master of Arts programs (M.A), Master of Science programs (M. Sc), and Doctor of Medicine courses, overall female enrolment is higher compared to male enrollment. On the other hand, during the academic years 2018-2019 to 2021-2022, Master of Laws (LL.M) and Master of Engineering courses (M. Eng) showed opposite results. In these courses, male enrolment is higher compared to female enrolment.

Finally, based on the AISHE reports, it is observed that overall enrolment of females in higher education has increased compared to the previous year's reports. For encouraging women's participation in higher education, various policies and awareness programmes play a significant role. Those schemes, such as Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), Udaan, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education, and Pragati, which encourage women's education, increase women's participation in higher education in India (Ezhilarasan et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

India is a developing country, and for this development, education plays a significant role. Each and every man and woman should be educated for more development in our country. For the new generation to build a progressive society, women's higher education is most important. In this study, researchers focused on female participation in Indian higher education. The main objectives of this study are to compare the female enrollment status in various streams, various castes, male-female enrollment status in different modes (distance and regular mode), and the male-female enrollment status in different streams. This study found that women's enrolment in higher education in India has made significant progress over the years. In several stream enrolment of women has increased steadily. However, disparities still exist in some professional courses, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged regions. Several barriers continue to restrict women's access to higher education, including financial constraints, gender discrimination, early marriage, family responsibilities, lack of awareness, safety concerns, and limited educational infrastructure in remote areas. To address these challenges, the government and educational institutions have introduced various facilities such as scholarships, fee concessions, reservation policies, hostels for women, transportation support, digital learning opportunities, and awareness programs. For increasing female participation in higher education, these measures have played an important role. In spite of these efforts, further improvements are necessary to ensure equitable access for all women. The study also suggests that continuous policy support, social transformation and collaborative efforts from government, institutions and society are essential to enhance women's enrolment and empower them through higher education, thereby contributing to the overall social and economic development of the country.

REFERENCES

- Arum, R., & Roksa, J. (2011). *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*. University of Chicago Press.
- Ezhilarasan, G., Sampath, M., Vaidyanathan, M. R., & Dinesh Kannan, R. (2024). An analysis on women enrolment in higher education in India. *Shanlax International Journal of Economics*, 12(2), 35–38. <https://doi.org/10.34293/economics.v12i2.718>
- Ghosh, S., & Kundu, A. (2025). Factors influencing females' enrollment in higher education institutions in India and the effectiveness of affirmative action. *Journal of Developing Areas*, 59(3), 303–326. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jda.2025.a965531>
- Hill, M. A., & King, E. (1995). Women's education and economic well-being. *Feminist economics*, 1(2), 21-46. https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/30163/download/33344/26501_1971_CEN.pdf
- Jamatia, P. L. (2023). The Impact of Parental Economic Challenges on Women's Education in India. *International Journal of Economic, Business, Accounting, Agriculture Management and Sharia Administration (IJEBAAS)*, 3(4).
- Kathiresan, V. (2022). Women In Higher Education Issues and Challenges - An Historical Perspective. *NeuroQuantology*, 20(11).
- Kumar, A., & Amin, J. n. (2023). *Reinforcement of Women's Education in Post-Independence India: A Historical Review*. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.24407974.v1>
- Kumar, M., Singh, R. K., Singh, N., Kumar, M., Goshisht, M. K., Joshi, D., Dixena, D., Netam, S. K., Kashyap, S. S., & Lal, D. (2025). Women in higher education in India: An empirical study. *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Scope*, 6(3), 973–987. <https://doi.org/10.47857/irjms.2025.v06i03.04511>

Women's Participation in Indian Higher Education

- Lone, M. A., Lone, A. H., & Ali, S. (2020). Women Empowerment through Higher Education: A Systematic Review. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*.
- Priya, P., Venkatesh, A., & Shukla, A. (2021). Two decades of theorising and measuring women's empowerment: Literature review and future research agenda. In *Women's Studies International Forum*, 87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2021.102495>
- Schuller, T., Preston, J., Hammond, C., Brassett-Grundy, A., & Bynner, J. (2004). The benefits of learning: The impact of education on health, family life and social capital. *Routledge Falmer*.
- Suminar, I., Arifiyanti, F., & Giovanni Ariantara, R. (2024). Unveiling Trends: A 3-Year Bibliographic Keyword Analysis of Women in Education Research. *Women, Education, and Social Welfare*, 1(1), 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.70211/wesw.v1i1.88>
- Tang, L., & Horta, H. (2022). Studies on women academics in Chinese academic journals: A review. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 76(4), 815-834. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12351>
- Tomassini, C. (2021). Gender gaps in science: systematic review of the main explanations and research agenda. *Education in the Knowledge Society (EKS)*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.14201/eks.25437>
- Westoby, C., Dyson, J., Cowdell, F., & Buescher, T. (2021). What are the barriers and facilitators to success for female academics in UK HEIs? A narrative review. *Gender and Education*, 33(8), 1033-1056. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.1884198>
- Zeinali, Z., Muraya, K., Molyneux, S., & Morgan, R. (2021). The use of intersectional analysis in assessing women's leadership progress in the health workforce in LMICs: a review. *International journal of health policy and management*, 11(8), 1262. <https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.2021.06>

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Das, S., Karmakar, D., Mohakud, L.L.& Mahato, S. (2026). Women's Participation in Indian Higher Education. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(2), 1700-1707. DIP:18.01.157.20261402, DOI:10.25215/1402.157