

Status of the Women in General Degree Higher Educational Services in West Bengal: A Spatial Perspective

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Abstract : Education plays a vital role in nation-building and prepares mankind to be resilient ultimately. So, this is an essential aspect of development as well as the wellbeing of society. Equity in higher education is one of the three fundamental pillars along with expansion and excellence. Keeping this in mind, in independent India, several national policies have been implemented to simultaneously promote the expansion, equity and excellence in this sector. Formation of UGC (University Grants Commission), the statutory regulatory body and implementation of RTE (Right to Education) are two most significant steps taken for the enhancement of the equity in higher educational institutes. The present work attempts to inspect the district level spatial variation of West Bengal, along with its underlying geographical causes to find out the viable ways to minimize this disparity for overall enhancement of the access, equity and quality of general degree higher education in the state. To fulfill these objectives for the women, percentage of female teachers as well other staffs in different posts and from social categories in the districts under the catchment area of different universities, has emphatically been studied from the information, available in the reports published by UGC, and mainly AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) through the SNO (State Nodal Officer), Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal during 2011-2022. The above-mentioned secondary data have been analyzed by the standard quantitative techniques as per UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) and/or AISHE criteria. The results show that the districts with proximity to Kolkata Metropolis or geographical favours have performed consistently healthier in the present context. The issues used in SWOC (Strength Weakness Opportunity Challenge) analysis; a standard qualitative technique has supported the equivalent consequence regarding this. Provision of different scholarships, enhancement of literacy and maintenance of a suitable environment for the women faculty members and staff would have to be the basic solutions to this present problem.

Key words: Equity, Women College and University, Gender parity, Measure of Greater Female, Female Literacy

Introduction

Education is the key of nation-building, acquisition of requisite knowledge and skill for sustained economic growth as well national progress (Kumar, 2013). Human capital formation thus becomes possible by higher education through analysis, synthesis and transformation of

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information into knowledge (Srinivas and Babu, 2015). So, education is the obvious strength of a nation forever. Inevitably, the developed nations of the world are the educated ones. Consequently, every constituent of the society has a fundamental right to it irrespective of their socio-economic and cultural differences (Shaguri, 2013).

Higher education or third level of educational hierarchy is actually an optional ultimate stage of formal learning. The higher education system in India is the third largest one at present. University Grants Commission (UGC) is the regulatory apex body of this system (Kiran and Kumari, 2016).

This concerned system in India typically represents a wide range of interstate and inter-district disparities in different levels (UGC, 2008). So, enhancement of social access to higher education is still important in the country. But this system faces challenges to establish equity and quality together (Nigavekar, 2003).

Equity, one of the basic pillars of higher education, primarily indicates fair access to livelihood, education, as well participation in socio-cultural affairs of a human society (Kiran, 2016). So, it obviously refers to equal opportunity to all sections of the society to participate in higher education (Govt. of Punjab, 2019). Social equity in education denotes the similar outcomes from HEIs (Higher Educational Institutions) with the students from different social groups. Thus, disparities would be on the basis of talents, motivations and efforts; not on the basis of caste, category, class, gender, religion or language (Kiran, 2016). But patriarchy and gender based discriminatory practices are still dynamic in the HEIs especially in the universities in India endlessly discouraging the women academicians to raise their voice regarding this (Samanta, 2022).

To endorse the equity in this vital sector in the country the following steps have become important ones that have been taken by the Union Govt.

- i. Implementation of Education Law- Right to Education
- ii. Improvement of the situation of education in backward regions and arrangement of it as per needs and characteristics of those fretful areas
- iii. Scholarships and education loans have been provided.
- iv. Problems of female students especially in rural areas have been finding out appropriately to establish true gender equity (Kiran, 2016).

In spite of the rough implementation of these steps, equity in terms of social issues is found for expansion and massification of higher education in India. Social disparity is still high throughout the nation, but regional disparity is more widened here in the country (Vegashee, 2019). In addition, coexistence or intersection of social and geographical disadvantages lead to lesser or negligible equity in access to higher educational opportunities. The long distance to be commuted by the stakeholders creates major economic burden on them (Vegashee, 2019)

Selection of the Study Area

West Bengal is one of the states, located at the eastern part of India. The state has 21 districts at present that serves a population of about 91,276,115 within the total area of 88,752sq km. The state ranks 4th just next to Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar regarding the size of population and density of population (Census of India, 2011).

West Bengal has been selected for this kind of research work primarily due to the following-

1. A large number of studies, publications, books, reports, other documents, contemporary newspapers, periodicals, reveal that most of the higher educational institutes of the state have no remarkable position or rank during a long period of time; even at national level.
2. Discussions with the academicians and the expertise of this respective field, depicts that the higher educational institutes of this state as a whole experience an unsatisfactory situation continuously in terms of various significant aspects of this field, like growth, infrastructural development etc.
3. Higher education is the matter of liability and is governed both by union and state government with a federal system in India. So, the structure of higher education differs from one state to the other usually. Therefore, to conduct this kind of study, a state is considered as a unit area of study.
4. Above all, this state is one of the foremost states, in terms of population growth in the country. But the overall economic condition of the people, system, institutional design, and accommodation capacity of the higher educational institutes along with their quality is not at par with the growing pressure of students.

Study Area

India, a developing country, passing through the second phase of Demographic Transition, experiences a high birth rate and almost no practice of family planning. Resulting rapid population growth affects directly the future expenditure of education (Tripathy, 1993). But unfortunately, only 1% of the graduates can avail the education loan in this country. Actually, the policies that offer the economic concessions to the students do not have focus on intelligence plus effort is equal to merit, instead of mediocrity and money equating merit (Dahiya, 2012).

The state of West Bengal has a total of 21 (data available for 19 of these ones) districts with a total population of about 91,276,115 within the total area of 88,752sq km (Census of India, 2011). In West Bengal, the higher educational institutes are distributed unevenly across the state, in spite of very recent growth of the number (NUEPA, 2013-2014). The data about the regional disparity of University Grants Commission (UGC) shows that in terms of access parameter (formal system) in higher education, this state is within the range from 3 to 5.69%, which is lower than

that of national average of 5.75% (Dahiya, 2012). The number of degree awarding institutions (university/ university level institutes) is lower here-26 only (rank-9th in India), in relation to the other states like Tamilnadu (59), Uttar Pradesh (58), Andhra Pradesh (46), Rajasthan (48), Maharashtra (44) etc. (Shaguri, 2013). Almost similar scenario is revealed in terms of college density (number of colleges/ lakh population of age 18-23 years: 8 only) also (MHRD, 2013). Consequently, the GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio) count (7.8% at present) is unsatisfactory in relation to national average (16%) as well as global average (26%) in this state (Dahiya, 2012). More specifically, the young population (18-23 years) counts 10971915 (general), 2684937 (SC), 663237 (ST) (Census of India, 2011), while the category wise GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) count is low- 12.8%, 8.6% and 5.9% respectively in the state (MHRD, 2013). Number of institutes of national importance is again unsatisfactory here-4 only, in relation to the other state in India (MHRD, 2013).

Objectives of the Study

Being motivated by the above considerations, the present study has the following primary objectives.

- (1) The fundamental one is to find out the scenario of women participation to render their services the general degree higher education in the districts of the concerned state.
- (2) Afterwards, the study has to focus on the district level spatial disparity of the status of women participation in general degree higher educational services, precisely analyzing the geographical factors responsible for it.
- (3) Finally, the viable ways are to be resolute in this perspective to pick up the overall status of the women in this particular sector in a well-defined approach eventually.

Methodology and Database

To analyze the status of participation of the women to serve general degree higher education the variables taken under the consideration are- percentage of female teachers engaged in various posts and from various social categories, percentage of female staff involved in various non-teaching posts during 2011 to 2022 to assess the gender-equity. All of this aforementioned necessary information has been collected from the Department of Higher Education of Government of West Bengal (AISHE report, 2011-2021) through the SNO (State Nodal Officer). All of those aforementioned data were analyzed with the help of some standard quantitative techniques provided by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) and/ or AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) at different points of time. To analyze the scenario more clearly a standard qualitative analysis has also been made with the issues used in SWOC (Strength Weakness Opportunity Challenge) analysis. For this, the meticulous discussions have been made over phone with the eminent academicians (both male and female) aged between 55-70 years

associated with the administrative activities both in public and private HEIs and rendering their services in the department of higher education of the concerned state. The diagrams have been drawn with the help of MS Excel.

Some of the limitations are incorporated in this study. So, the authors were compelled to adapt to the following situations.

- AISHE data (the source of secondary data) is available from 2011 onwards till 2022 presently.
- All the institutions do not participate from the very beginning of the concerned survey by the authority of AISHE since 2011 or since their (HEIs; that means Higher Educational Institutions) establishment or initiation of academic sessions.
- The Central authority of AISHE keeps few ones particularly those related to funding unavailable completely or partially for a specific period of time.

Teacher Engagement

Percentage of Female Teacher in Post Wise Engagement

This indicator in terms of different posts approved or created by UGC and/or respective state govt. mainly focuses an imprint on progress of women in this crucial field of national development. For this, the data available from the AISHE reports, on the bases of the universities and the affiliated colleges of those. UNESCO Institute for Statistics count this percentage using the method $(\text{Female/Total}) * 100$, where the total includes the entire female plus male teacher together. According to this institute, if the value is approaching 50% it denotes Gender Parity and when it is $>50\%$, indicates the greater participation of females in this profession of teaching.

Administrator

Teaching posts, engaged in administrative activities primarily include Vice Chancellors, Pro-Vice Chancellors, and Directors for the universities. For these above-mentioned posts, the percentage of females is either remarkably low or nothing in most of the universities of the state during 2011-2022. But there are some exceptions also. Gender parity is found in Kolkata by CU (University of Calcutta) in 2012-2013, 2017-2019 and 2020, by NSOU (Netaji Subhash Open University) in 2015, by Amity University in 2015 and 2019; West Medinipur by VU (Vidya Sagar University) in 2015, Bardhaman by BU (The University of Burdwan) in 2011, Birbhum by Visva Bharati in 2011-12 and 2016 and North 24 Parganas by WBSU (West Bengal State University) in 2020-2021. Similarly, greater female participation is noticed in Kolkata (CU-2016, Presidency-2011-22 Sanskrit College and University since 2020), South 24 Parganas (DHWU: Diamond Harbour Women's University-2014-22), Puruliya (SKBU: Sidho Kanho Birs University-2012), Bardhaman (KNU: Kazi Nazrul University-2013), Nadia (Kanyashree-2020, 2021) and Birbhum (Visva Bharati-2013, 2017 and Seacom Skills-2016-2019 and 2022) only.

Principals are the head of the institutions exclusively in the colleges. For this post, greater female participation is recorded in the district of North 24 Parganas (colleges affiliated to WBSU) in 2018 and gender parity in Part of Bardhaman (colleges affiliated to KNU) in 2015, 2016 and 2019. No other institutes from any of the districts recorded gender parity and/or more female participation at any point of time during 2011 to 2019. Since 2020 none of the colleges have met the criteria of gender parity and /or greater female in the state. Therefore, the scenario has deteriorated throughout the state unfortunately. The districts of Northern part of the state have performed extremely poorly in this regard with 10-20% even <10% (Cooch Behar by the colleges affiliated to CPBU: Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University) value. Most of the districts of Southern part also have fairly parallel scenarios having 10-20% of the females in this concerned regard. Districts of Kolkata, Haora, partially Hughli and South 24 Parganas together by the colleges affiliated to CU (>30%), North 24 Parganas by the colleges affiliated to WBSU (20-30%) and part of Bardhaman by the colleges affiliated to KNU (either 20-30% or >30%) have the exceptions only. So, immediate actions would be taken throughout the state so that more women become encouraged to render their services for this post.

Full Time Teachers

In the case of a full-time teacher, the posts of Professor, Associate Professor, and Assistant Professor are considered together primarily. Gender parity for these posts is found in Kolkata, South 24 Parganas, Haora and southern part of Hughli district in 2018- 2020 by CU and its colleges. Amongst these districts the first two that means Kolkata for Presidency in 2014, for RBU (Rabindra Bharati University) from 2017 to 2022, Sanskrit College and University in 2020 and 2021, NSOU 2016 to 2017, Amity 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020-2022, Techno India in 2022, St. Xavier's in 2020 and 2021 and South 24 Parganas singly for DHWU from 2017 to 2022 have some other institutes also with gender parity. Hughli individually by Rani Rashmoni Green University has gender parity in 2020. The district of North 24 Parganas was in this category throughout the decade and afterwards till 2022 by WBSU along with its colleges. In addition, this district further had gender parity by JIS in 2018 to 2022; by Adamas in 2016 and from 2019 to 2022 and by Swami Vivekananda University in 2021. Therefore, this district shows gender parity since 2019 in terms of all of the institutes offering general degree courses. Greater female participation is found in Kolkata, Haora, South 24 Parganas and southern part of Hughli from 2011 to 2017 by CU and its colleges and in South 24 Parganas in 2016 by DHWU. Kolkata separately recorded greater female participation by Amity University in 2015 and 2017, Sanskrit College and University in 2022, St. Xavier's University in 2020 and 2022, Sister Nivedita University in 2020 also. So, it is understood that Kolkata, North 24 Parganas, Haora, South 24 Parganas and southern part of Hughli district as a whole had either gender parity or more female participation for these posts in terms of most of the universities along with their colleges, which became gradually stronger since 2016.

In 2011, the University of Kolkata and its affiliated colleges had Assistant Professors with more female than male. RBU has more male in Associate Professor but the gap was very low (8).

Kazi Nazrul University					GF	GP		GF		GF	
Sidho-Kanho Birsa University											
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda	GF										
Rani Rasmoni Green University											
West Bengal State University											
JIS University								GF			GF
Adamas University						GP		GP			
Swami Vivekananda University											
Diamond Harbour Women's University						GF				GF	GF
The Neotia University									GP		
University of Calcutta											
Jadavpur University	GF	GP				GP					
Rabindra Bharati University			GP		GP			GP	GF		GP
Presidency University											
Aliah University											
Netaji Subhash Open University		GP									
Amity University										GP	
Brainware University											

Data Source: AISHE (2011-2022), Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal

Note: Gender Parity (GP) and Greater Female (GF) (as per UNESCO Criteria) are shown. The white ones do not meet those Criteria

So, it can be stated that as a whole, higher posts of the academicians are served by remarkably lesser proportions of the female ones. Similarly, full time posts (Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor) are occupied by a lesser number of females in comparison to the posts like Contractual, Visiting and/ or Part time etc. Some of the affiliating State-Public universities like

Scheduled Caste

[illegible]

Sidho-Kanho Birsa University	GP											
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda												
Rani Rasmoni Green University												
West Bengal State University												
JIS University												NI
Adamas University							GF	GP	GP			NI
Swami Vivekananda University									GF			NI
Diamond Harbour Women's University												NI
The Neotia University									GP			NI
University of Calcutta												
Jadavpur University												
Rabindra Bharati University								GP				
Presidency University								GP	GP			NI
Aliah University												NI
Netaji Subhash Open University	GF		GF	GP								NI
Amity University												NI
Brainware University								GF	GF			NI
Techno India University							GP					NI
Sanskrit College and University									GP			NI
St. Xavier's University												
Sister Nivedita University									GF			NI
Vidya Sagar University												

Data Source: AISHE (2011-2022), Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal

Note: Gender Parity (GP) and Greater Female (GF) (as per UNESCO Criteria) are shown. The white ones do not meet those Criteria. No information (NI) denotes unavailability of data and/ or information from these universities regarding this concerned category.

[illegible]

Sidho-Kanho Birsa University											
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda	GF										NI
Rani Rasmoni Green University									GF		NI
West Bengal State University											
JIS University											NI
Adamas University											NI
Swami Vivekananda University											NI
Diamond Harbour Women's University						GF		GP			NI
The Neotia University									GF	GP	NI
University of Calcutta											
Jadavpur University											GF
Rabindra Bharati University				GP							
Presidency University											NI
Aliah University											NI
Netaji Subhash Open University											NI
Amity University											NI
Brainware University										GP	NI
Techno India University										GP	NI
Sanskrit College and University											NI
St. Xavier's University											
Sister Nivedita University											
Vidya Sagar University											

Data Source: AISHE (2011-2022), Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal

Note: Gender Parity (GP) and Greater Female (GF) (as per UNESCO Criteria) are shown. The white ones

do not meet those Criteria. No information (NI) denotes unavailability of data and/ or information from these universities regarding this concerned category.

Therefore, it is clear from the above discussion, that female participation from all of these categories is extremely low. So, females from these categories would have to receive special attention to contribute to this profession.

Engagement of Non-Teaching Staff

Percentage of Female Staff in Post Wise Engagement

Similarly, the scenario in terms of the engagement of non-teaching staffs from different categories and percentage of females in different posts (Group-A, B, C, and D collectively) can also be represented on the basis of available data from the sides of AISHE to assess the availability of educational services in the higher educational institutes. During 2011 to 2022 Kolkata experiences continuous increase of proportion of female staff at different posts even in the higher posts also. North 24 Parganas, Bardhaman, Medinipur and Darjeeling are not too far to the rear regarding this. But other districts have no remarkable picture here in the context. As a whole, it can be said that the higher posts are served usually by the lesser proportion of the female staff. Unfortunately, there is no university along with its affiliated colleges in the state with larger female participation in the posts of Non-Teaching-Staff. Gender parity is found in this context only in Kolkata (Amity in 2019, Brainware in 2016 and 2020), South 24 Parganas (DHWU in 2015 and Neotia in 2016) and Birbhum (Seacom Skills in 2020). Percentage of female staff is <20% or equal to 20% in maximum districts during the period of 2011 to 2019. Since 2020 the district of Kolkata, Haora, Hughli, South 24 Parganas together (CU and its colleges in 2021 and 2022); Kolkata individually (Techno India in 2020), South 24 Parganas singly (DHWU in 2020); Medinipur (VU and its colleges in 2021), North 24 Parganas (WBSU and its colleges in 2021 and 2022; JIS in 2020; SVU in 2020), part of Bardhaman (KNU and its colleges since 2020), Nadia (Kalyani university and its colleges in 2021 and 2022), Bankura (Bankura university and its colleges in 2021 and 2022) Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri (NBU and its colleges in 2021 and 2022), Koch Bihar (CPBU and its colleges in 2021) have >20% of the female staffs for this kind of higher educational services promote the picture a little superior.

Discussion on Findings

In terms of engagement of faculty members for both fulltime and non- full time posts and from different social categories; employment of non-teaching staff at different posts in the southern part always performs better than that of the northern part of the state. This zone wise differentiation is mainly due to the geographical factors like dominance of plains, prevalence of comparatively favourable climatic conditions, fairly lower occurrence of hazards like landslide and /or earthquake, flood etc, relatively favourable circumstances to upgrade the transport especially railways, ferry services as well communication network along with electrification, in the southern part of the

state. That denotes the greater availability of the amenities and infrastructural facilities in the most of the districts in this part of the state. Consequently, this particular part of the state experiences greater level of urbanization in the most of the districts. Therefore, secondary, tertiary and quaternary sectors of economy are found to be dominant here in this part of the state. On the other hand, urbanization promotes higher level of HDI (Human Development Index) with 75.70% positive correlation (Anisujjaman, 2015). Thus, the greater level of urbanization can boost up the quality of life of the local human community (Dahiya, 2012). So, the higher educational institutes of urban areas always experience progress in the context of excellence than that of the rural ones (Dahiya, 2012). Inescapably, the socio-cultural and economic status along with the level of literacy along with female literacy, level of aspiration as well awareness- all are higher in the most of the districts of this part of the state. Consequently, the eligibility, potential, quality, ability of the women to perform well consistently is considerably high. Thus, the scenario of their participation in this higher prestigious occupation is better here in this part of the concerned state.

Especially regarding the present context, the district of North 24 parganas has an apex position in the state as almost all the public and private HEIs have gender parity and/ or greater female participation since 2011 for all kinds of posts as well from ST category. Higher level of urbanization (57.59% increased by only 3.29% from previous decade), higher level of literacy (84.06%; increased by 6.88% from previous decade), higher level of female literacy (80.34%; ranks second in the state), higher HDI (0.66; ranks 3rd); and closer proximity to Kolkata promote the scenario at this high level. Thus, the non-existence of affiliating universities for a long period of time since independence and remote location of some of the colleges near international borders with tainted communication networks could not impose barriers in the present context.

The district of Kolkata, Haora, part of Hugli and South 24 Parganas together exhibits gender parity and/ or greater female status till now by the most of the public affiliating universities and their affiliated colleges as well non-affiliating public and private universities. Some of the non-affiliating public as well private universities have unexpectedly low percentages of female staff in this regard. But those HEIs are comparatively low in proportion. Thus, as a whole the circumstance is better in relation to the other districts of the state.

Actually, the district of Kolkata never faces dispossession in aspect of higher education mainly due to the highest level of urbanization (100%), highest HDI (0.78), highest rate of literacy (87.14%) and female literacy (84.06%) as well here within the state. This district has always achieved a great preference and precedence of the authorities as well students and staff with good quality from the very beginning. It was the national capital of the British period, and has maintained its position as the primate city of the concerned state for a long time. Therefore, most of the amenities along with the infrastructural facilities may become complementary to each other in the city within more or less physical arrangements. The existence of old, reputed HEIs even from the British period onwards also upgrade the scenario up to a level that is satisfactory enough.

Haora and Hugli, mainly the former one being the inseparable parts of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area have higher levels of urbanization (Haora 63.60%, Hugli 38.62%). Consequently, the HDI (Haora 0.68 and Hugli 0.63; ranks 2nd and 6th respectively) values are inevitably high there. Presently, the literacy level (Haora 83.31% and Hugli 81.80%) as well female literacy (Haora 79.43% and Hugli 76.36%) is very high in those districts. They experienced a considerably high rate of increase both in terms of the level of urbanization and literacy level always. Haora and Hugli have 13.24% and 5.15% of rate of increase in level of urbanization and 6.84% and 7.44% of rate of rise in literacy level correspondingly. Moreover, Hugli exclusively is fortunate enough to have a new non-affiliating public university also that recorded at least 35% and above value regarding this. So, in the near future, HEIs here will perform continuously better in the required criteria of the present context.

Similarly, South 24 Parganas has higher literacy rate (77.51% increased by 9.12% from previous decade). There is one public non-affiliating university exclusively for women. Colleges are affiliated to the older reputed public university of Kolkata. So, in spite of lower level of female literacy (71.40%), lower level of urbanization (25.61% increased by 9.88% from previous decade), comparatively lower level of HDI (0.60; ranks 8th) and existence of islands of Sundarban with very high possibility to be affected by devastating climatic hazards and subsequent floods covering a large part of the district the scenario is quite promising.

Both of the Medinipur scenarios are not satisfactory enough. Gender parity and greater female participation is completely absent here in the district. Presence of older, affiliating university since 1980-90 with proficient infrastructure, governance and system, high rate of increase of literacy level (East Medinipur 7.50%, West Medinipur 8.63% from previous decade), high female literacy (75.93%) even could not promote the situation considerably healthier in the districts.

Bardhaman partially by KNU have recorded gender parity and greater female; at least female participation value 35% and above consistently since 2011 with respect to all of the aspects except from ST category. On the other hand, the rest of the district by BU and its colleges reveal an amazingly substandard scenario recording the value 35% and below in most of the aspects since 2011. Actually, the level of urbanization (39.87% increased by 2.93% from previous decade) literacy rate (76.21% increased by 6.97% from previous decade), mainly female literacy (69.63%) as well rate of rise of those- all are not too high here. The location of this district is not included within the zone of KMA till now. So, female participation in this higher profession is reasonably lower here. Presence of affiliating universities since 1950-60 and higher HDI (0.64; ranks 5th) could not promote the scenario up to standard.

Bankura and Puruliya are covered by the part of peninsular plateau with ruggedness of topography and thicker vegetation cover. The HDI (Bankura 0.52, Puruliya 0.45) and female literacy (Bankura 60.05%, Puruliya 50.52%) are remarkably low in both of the districts. Thus, the scenario

exclusively in the present context is dishonored enough recording a female participation proportion around 20% that cannot be improved by the higher literacy level around 70%.

The district of Birbhum in terms of all kind of universities (one State-Public, one Central and one State-Private) and colleges recorded extremely low percentage of female participation of all aspects of the present study mainly due to the rural location of the HEIs and low female literacy of 64.14%.

For the SC category participation of female teachers is very low as a whole. Only NSOU, Brainware and Sister Nivedita University in Kolkata presented a comparatively better scenario. It reveals that the city like Kolkata, mainly the State-Public University with ODL mode of teaching or State-Private is preferred by this category of female to render their services. Engagement from OBC category also encompasses the standard scenario in very few numbers of State-Public (JU) and State-Private universities (Brainware and Techno India) in Kolkata and South 24 Parganas (Neotia: State- Private). Again, the facilities in and around the city are revealed strongly.

For all kind of teaching posts, gender parity and /or more female participation in most of the years is mainly concentrated in the institutes of southern part of the state, especially, in Kolkata, Haora, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, and part of Hugli, Bardhaman. In other districts from this part and entire northern part (except for the posts of other teachers) except the district of Darjeeling the scenario is remarkably disappointing. For both of the kinds of fulltime and non-full time posts most of the districts of this part of the state for all the universities like CPBU, GBU, Raigunj along with their affiliated colleges, even by Darjeeling Hills University and South Dinajpur University; the newly established ones since 2021 recorded extremely low female participation of 30 and below. Only Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri for NBU and its colleges recorded gender parity consistently even greater female in one or two years since 2011 for the non-full time posts. This is mainly due to the higher literacy (79.56%) and female literacy (73.33%), comparatively higher level of urbanization (38.99%) and higher HDI (0.65; ranks 4th in state) of the district as the obvious consequences of the up gradation of tourism industry and tea industry and above all presence of older, affiliating university since 1960-70 within the territorial boundary of the district. The literacy and level of urbanization increased by 6.65% and 8.13% respectively from the previous decade.

The other districts in this part of the state have considerably lower level of literacy (ranging from 59% to 74%), lower level of female literacy (ranging from 52% to 67%), lower level of urbanization (ranging from 10% to 20%) as well lower HDI (ranging from 0.49 to 0.53) even at the present days.

So, the level of equity in terms of the post wise engagement of female faculty in the HEIs is astonishingly low in those districts.

ST category shows maximum female engagement in this profession mainly in the districts of the northern part of the state. Rise in this regard is more consistent in those districts also. Actually, those districts are dominated by tribal populations with the growing awareness and eligibility of the women of this category. In addition, they feel favourable to render their service in this profession within their known domain of the state also. So, it can be stated that the HEIs of those districts have favourable situations for the tribal female.

Recommendations on the Bases of Experts' Opinion

In case of most of the issues the district of Kolkata, Haora, Hughli, North 24 Parganas are in top position. Bardhaman, Nadia, West Medinipur are in the second group. Maldah, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Puruliya are in the next level. In the northern part of the state the progress is noticeably low except Darjeeling. The districts to occupy the kind of positions have been analyzed in terms of individual issues in the exclusive chapter.

On the basis of the overall scenario the state can be divided in the following divisions. On the bases of the critical issues of the SWOC analysis the district-specific problems and solutions can be as follows -

Districts of Northern Part of West Bengal

Strengths and opportunities

- *Tourism industries in Himalayas* that shares the major and largest proportion of the source of the livelihoods of that region including the women
- *Growing awareness of tribal people* about the impact of higher education in enjoying the all aspects of individual's life

Challenges

- *Identification of needy first generation learners* as this region is dominated by this kind of people with the affordability of the fees required in higher education
- *Lower level of literacy* cannot lead to the high enrolment or excellence in higher education
- *Existence of remote villages* that are not enlightened with basic education. Some unwanted prejudices are supported by the local people in those villages also especially for the women
- *Agrarian economy is enough to earn livelihood* for that they are not interested in the tertiarization of the economy in their domain

To overcome the challenges, more transparent implementation of scholarships, regular organization of community development programmes to grow awareness, creation of suitable jobs at the end of the studies and well developed transport and communication networks are to receive more emphasis.

Districts of Southern Part of West Bengal-***Strengths and opportunities***

- *High Level of urbanization* enhances the level of aspirations that is quite unfeasible without higher education
- *Better quality of life* enables people to meet the expense of as well encourage to be endlessly better through higher education
- *Facilities to upgrade the children properly* congregate the required level of eligibility of quality higher education
- *Favourable physiographic and climatic conditions* facilitate the up gradation of communication network and maintenance of regularity in the required services concerned sector
- *Well connected through transport and communication network to different parts of country even abroad* helps in continuously better input of infrastructures and learning resources through different academic programmes
- *Presence of the Kolkata megalopolis* that is the one of the most hospitable, renowned cultural hub of the country with its glorious past-contribution of higher education

Challenges

- *Better job opportunities* as the sectors are superfluous with no inauguration of the new organizations and institutions
- *Timely release of funds* poses hindrances and a time lag occurs in academic activities
- *Lack of full time posts of teachers with required eligibilities and qualifications especially in the colleges* hampers the quality of teaching-learning
- *Lack of regularity in educational service by non-teaching staff* delays the processing and ultimately degrades the quality
- *Lack of proper up gradation of infrastructures* especially skill development centres, capacity building and training centres does not encourage the proper orientation to enhance the employability
- *Psychological set up of the family members* forced the women to bring a perfect equilibrium between professional and personal responsibilities often make them to be compelled either to discontinue or to select non-full time service or course of study

To strengthen the opportunities reducing the challenges proper judgment of level of excellence would have to be done for the individual students of the HEIs. Transparency in system, regular recruitment of full time teachers as per UGC regulations especially in the colleges,

encouragement of relevant academic programmes as well research works would be supportive to overcome the challenges gradually.

Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum: The Backward Districts

Challenges

- *Dominance of tribal population* most of whom are not interested to orient themselves exceptionally
- Part of *Chhotanagpur plateau* and *presence of forests* in the two former districts made those geographically backward
- *Sufficient livelihood from agricultural sector* makes the people uninterested to welcome as well habituated with the other sectors

To overcome the challenges community development programmes, increase of literacy rate, provision of well transport and communication network are to be the initial steps to be taken by the government.

Conclusions

To establish gender equity the more benefit of scholarships exclusively for the women like Kanyashree (Govt. of West Bengal), Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child Scholarship (Union Govt.) would have to be extended. The women of geographically backward districts like Purulia, Bankura with hilly tracks and forest covers; Maldah, Murshidabad, Nadia, both of Dinajpur with proximity to international borders would have to receive much attention also. The process of availability of those scholarships or to join the special awareness programme would have to be made easier and transparent. Number of women colleges and universities would have to be increased considerably throughout the state mainly by respective state Govt. Those colleges would have greater intake capacity along with the laboratory and other facilities for Science and Social Science with proper care. Situations in laboratories and field works would have to become more favourable and fearless for the female students in all the universities and colleges. Moreover, the capability of the female students would have to be raised to increase their resilience.

Govt and/ or authorities of HEIs have to take initiatives to encourage an escalating number of women to prefer to participate in this prestigious profession to serve the full time posts and mainly principal posts. For this, some opportunities can be provided by imposing reservation for a specific proportion of vacant posts for them. Exactly the same ways can be followed for the posts of the staff other than teaching ones. In the universities and colleges favourable work-conditions and situations would have to be created and maintained for the women sincerely. Proper monitoring would have to be performed also regarding this. The safe accommodation facilities would have to be provided for the women from the sides of Govt. or the HEIs while they have to stay at the non-commutable distance.

Actually, the financial provisions and aids would be increasingly greater for general degree higher education for all the streams like Arts, Science, Commerce, and Social Science throughout the state especially for the women students. Similar kinds of provisions would have to become available for the academic development of the female staff mainly for the research work. Greater number of special funding schemes is to be introduced for the students of lower family income. For this, transparent selection of the female students from EWS (Economically Weaker Section) category would have to be implemented. Transparent selection would have to be implemented to find out the actual first generation female learners. Job opportunities, scope of research and innovations as well as employability would have to be raised simultaneously so that creamy layer may be encouraged to enroll them. For this, the acceptable framing of curriculum is required to be framed to make it contemporary. Faculty members and other staff would have to be recruited regularly strictly as per the guidelines and regulations made by the regulatory apex body for uninterrupted good quality of teaching-learning and educational services. Suitable working situations should be maintained in and around the HEIs for the female students and staff. To monitor this, regular feedback would have to be taken from them by the government. Remote districts like South 24 Parganas, Puruliya, Bankura, Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, both of Dinajpur would have to be provided with as much as greater communication facilities and those have to become easily accessible mainly to the women of the society. In these districts the network would have to be developed centering the HEIs to make those beneficiaries. The districts covered with forest islands or prone to natural hazards are already devoid of touch of higher education. These districts would have to be better connected to their nearby cities and Kolkata. Simultaneously, promoting higher levels of literacy and HDI awareness of the society as a whole would have to be enhanced and perception about women would have to be improved. The proper utilization of funds, mainly the scholarships by the students of the above-mentioned districts would have to be monitored by the respective HEIs and the funding authorities regularly. The districts would have to be divided as per above mentioned intensity according to the above-mentioned aspects to monitor whether there is proper implementation of the required benefits at district level.

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