A Study on Challenges and Opportunities for Adolescent Girls in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Background: The economic status and social wellbeing of any states is determined by the education opportunities that provided by the nation. When it comes to higher education India stands third in the world after United States and China. The birth, development and growth of Indian higher education system is phenomenal. The participation of women in our education system is always considered as a matter of discussion. In this context, this review paper focuses on participation of Indian adolescent girls in our higher education system.

Materials &Methods: This review paper majorly aims to know the challenges and opportunities of adolescent girls in higher education system. This review paper analyzed the subject matter with the objectives of knowing the history of higher education system, the existing policies and programmes in higher education system of India, the programmes specifically for improving the enrollment of women in Indian higher education system, and the level of gender equality in Indian higher education structure. For this purpose, both government and non-government documents, reports and various research articles in Indian context have been selected and reviewed.

Findings: Based on the review of literature it was observed that the gender gap in the literacy rate in India is still existing. Though female participation in higher education is improving, still the gender disparity exists. As per the census report of 2011, the male – female literacy gap is 16.68%. Another major gap was found in rural and urban women enrollment in higher education. These findings have led this review article with the conclusion that India is in need of strong evidence-based programmes and policies for adolescent girls.

Keywords: Higher Education System, Adolescent Girls, Policies and Programmes, Women Enrollment, Gender Equality.

A STUDY ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

"If you educate a man you educate an individual, however if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women Empowered means Mother India Empowered".

- ***Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru***

I.   INTRODUCTION

This is an era of knowledge. It is very sure that, the more one is educated the more he or she is empowered. Education leads any nation to growth and development in general and society in particular. In India education lies in the Concurrent List of the Indian Constitution. India stands third in the higher education system in the world next to China and United States. Since independence, India has witnessed for a tremendous increase in the number of universities, university level institutions and colleges (Nigam, Ganesh& Rana, 2019; Sheikh, 2017). The right to Education Act has stipulated compulsory and free education to all children those who are in the age group of 6 to 14 years (Shaguri, 2013). In India the number of Universities has increased 34 times a number of 20 in 1950's to 677 in 2014, but at the same time, our nation has failed in producing world class universities. Even though India has travelled a long way in education sector, India is facing stern challenges. Despite the challenges, Indian education equally have lot of opportunities to overcome all these challenges and has the capacity to face all these challenges and is capable for make its standard of higher

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education sector in international level. The birth, development and growth of Indian higher education system is phenomenal.

The participation of women in our education system is always considered as a matter of discussion. It is high time to take forward the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls through education in all institutions and also it is highly important to consider the inclusion of our young girls' participation in higher education institutes and address a set of fundamental questions on gender inequality in our education system (Pokhriyal, 2020). The NCPCR report clearly showed the data of representation of girls in higher education sector of India and the report shows that 39.4% of adolescent girls who are aged between 15 to 18are not going to any educational institutions and among them a vast majority that is approximately 65 percent are engaged in household activities or are engaged in begging (Firstpost, 2020). In this context, this review paper focuses on participation of Indian adolescent girls in our higher education system.

II.   THEORETICAL PERCEPTION
Durkheim's Functionalist Theory of Education (Thompson, 2017; Singh & Rabindranath, 2020)
"Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity: education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the mind of the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that social life demands" (Durkheim's Perspective on Education, 2017, para. 2.).

This review paper has followed Durkheim's Functionalist theory of Education as the theoretical frame work for analysing the importance of education as well as the need to educate our girls. Durkheim believed and argued that schools can serve better than the family either based on kinship or friendship, in a complex society and educational institutions does this by functioning the enforcement of set of rules and regulations that is applicable to all children and thereby it acts like a society in miniature. Thus, this theory proposes that education facilitates social interaction so that girls do not feel alone and they are also supported by their family, friends and society. This theoretical perspective makes the base for this review article.

Materials and Methods
The study attempts to review the challenges and opportunities of adolescent girls in higher education system. The researcher has analyzed the review of available secondary data and emphasised the need of getting care and support from the environment around them. Since the theory adopted clearly says the significance of education in the empowerment of society as a whole and particularly in women empowerment. With this aim the researcher intends to know the subject matter with the objectives of knowing the growth and expansion of Indian higher education system, the programmes specifically for improving the enrollment of women in Indian higher education system, and the level of gender equality in Indian higher education structure. For this purpose, both government and non-government documents, reports and various research articles in Indian context have been selected and reviewed.

Having these as the main aims, the data enumerated in the secondary sources such as stastical data that is compiled by both government and non-government organizations and other research articles in the Indian context have been reviewed. The secondary data obtained was further assessed to understand the relevance of education system in a nation for the betterment of the women in particular.

III.   DISCUSSION
Indian Higher Education Sector
For a developing country like India, education plays vital role in the growth and development. Higher education sector in India has witnessed a tremendous and phenomenal growth since the independence. India has produced eminent professionals in all fields who were highly accepted by the world.

India has been always a land of great scholars and learners. Since ancient time our country has contributed excellent universities and scholars to the world. India was regarded in all over the world for the universities like Taxila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila. The journey of education system of India continued after independence systematically. At the time of independence there were 20 universities, 500 colleges and around 2,30,000 student enrolments in India. The progress was marked with 659 universities, and 33023 colleges in 2011-2012(Sheikh, 2017). Indian higher education system stands third in the world right after China and United States in terms of its diversity and number of educational institutions. Indian higher education frame work is so complex and it consists of various types of educational institutions (Sharma & Sharma, 2015).

The concurrent list of Indian constitution includes 'Education' and it is clearly mentioned that both Government of India and State Governments are equally responsible to set up schools, colleges and universities for imparting the education to the Indian citizens. The Right to Education was came in effect from 1st April, 2010, which was included by 86th Amendment of Indian Constitution under Article 21(A) in December 2002 and passed by the Indian Parliament in July 2009. This was a remarkable milestone in Indian Higher Education history. The article says, "the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six

to fourteen years in such a manner as the state may, by law, determine" (Nigam, Ganesh & Rana, 2019). Government of India established 'University Education Commission' in 1948 as per the recommendation of National Education Policy which is later renamed as University Grants Commission. The growth of number of colleges and universities in India is exponential. The number of colleges and universities were increased from 578 to 39,931 and 28 to 993 in 1950- 1951 to 2018-2019 respectively. And the ratio of teachers and students in 1950-1951 was 24,000 to 1.74 lakh whereas in 2018-2019 it is 14.16 lakh to 3.74 crore (Ministry of Higher Education, 2019).

Apart from all these advantages, Indian higher education system face challenges to implement all these provisions in practical. There are a number of issues that are facing by our nation's education sector. It comprises inadequate infrastructure and facilities, poor quality of faculties, low student enrolment rate, outdated teaching methods, declined research standards, gender, ethnic issues and so on (Ghara, 2016).

Some challenges were portrayed as British Council, (2014) can be listed as below
- The Supply- demand Gap
- The low quality of teaching and learning
- Constrains on research capacity and innovation
- Uneven growth and access to opportunity

Despite these challenges India would be able to overcome the challenges.

The Gender Equality in Higher Education System

Education can be described as the process of liberating the mind, particularly the liberation from all forms of darkness and ignorance. The high level of illiteracy rate of women and the gender gap in the literacy rate are significant in the social, economic and cultural factors.

The literacy rate and educational facilities pave the way for social and economic development of any country. In India the literacy rate is increasing since independence but still the female literacy rate is lower than the male literacy rate. As per the 2011 census report, the male and female literacy rate is 82.14% and 65.46% respectively (Maddela& Pradeep, 2019). This data will clearly highlight the prevailing disparities between male and female literacy rates.

There are multiple policies and programmes by the Government of India and some of them are discussed by Kumar (2013) as follows
- Education in the Concurrent list
- National Education Policy, 1986
- Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009
- District Primary Education Programme
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
- MahilaSamakhya

The need to transform the equality of women from *de jure* to *de facto* was discussed in the report of National Council for Women's education and it is mandatory for changing the attitude of both men and women towards each other and to themselves. It can be noted that the low women literacy rate is the major reason for low national literacy rate. Women education can be portrayed as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is not one single issue or factor that is responsible for low literacy rate of Indian women. These factors always associated with social, cultural, economic, educational, demographic, administrative, political and so on. The shocking data as per 2011 census is, more than 52 million girls are out of the formal education sector of India (Pareek, 2013).

If we go through the obstacles of women education in India, the factors can be analysed as geographical, socio-cultural, health, economic, religious, legal, political/administrative and educational factors. The barriers to women education are still remain in our society and some of them are sociological, which is rooted in gender stereotyping and gender inequality and some other factors are driven by economic concerns and constraints. Some major issues of women education can be classified according to Jadon and Shrivastava (2018) as

Systematic Issues	Process of Education	Economy, Society and Culture
Problem of access	Gender stereotyping	Poverty and powerlessness
Dysfunctional of schools	Gender bias	Status of women
Quality of schools	Relevance of curriculum	Cost of family
Motivation of teachers	Language	Child labour
Multiple delivery system of education	Joyful learning	Domestic works and survival battles

Why the women education is relevant?
- Economic development and prosperity
- Economic empowerment
- Improved life
- Improved health
- Dignity and honour
- Justice
- Freedom to choose own profession
- Poverty Alleviation
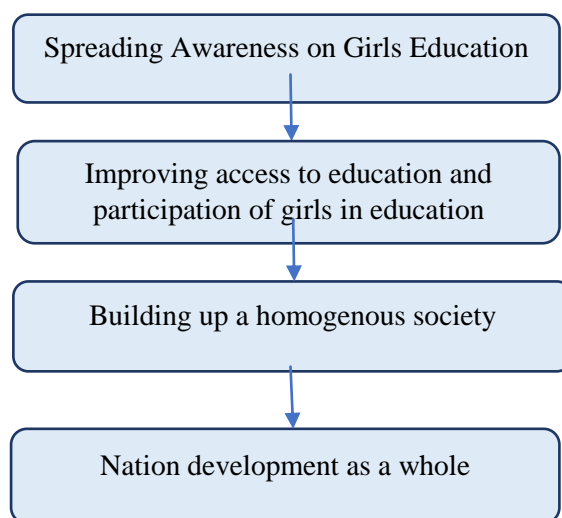- Strengthening of democracy

(Margaret, 2017).

It is very important to take some steps to improve women education in India. The above said objectives can be achieved only through implementing quality education for our adolescent girls. Some of the strategies for the betterment of women education can be discussed as

- Enable our women population to improve their family health and diet.
- Improve women's productive ability and there by improve their family's standard of living.
- Improve women's societal and cultural factors.
- Be capable our women to discharge their responsibilities more effectively.
- Aid women to fight against their own fears and feelings of inadequacy or inferiority
- Women must be educated regarding their all-round development that is mentally, socially, physically, psychologically, religiously and economically.

Suggested Frame Work for Development of Nation by Educating Girls
After going through all the literatures reviewed a frame work has been suggested which may help in boosting the gender equality in our higher education system.

Spreading Awareness on Girls Education

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Improving access to education and participation of girls in education

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Building up a homogenous society

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Nation development as a whole

Empowerment make a girl efficient to control and decide her own destiny. Educating girls is the most effective tool towards their empowerment as well as their well-being. In India girls have only limited access to education though things are in the face of change. Only by acquiring formal education they will be able to fight against gender discrimination, injustices and the traditions that hinder their freedom. Education is the fundamental right of a citizen of India. Education is the key factor in the women empowerment. The theoretical frame work of the study clearly mentioned about the homogeneity of the society and this can be attained only through education, which will eradicate the gender discrimination and will lead to gender equality. The equal participation of women in our higher education sector will definitely help our nation make a vital contribution to sustainable development.

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