



Gender Study in Higher Education in India: A Critical Analysis (Based on the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2023–24)

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Abstract

Gender equality in higher education is central to social justice, human capability development, economic participation and democratic citizenship. This seminar paper critically analyses the gender dimension of higher education in India using the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2023–24 as its principal empirical source. AISHE provides gender-disaggregated information on enrolment, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Gender Parity Index (GPI), social categories, disciplines, teaching and non-teaching staff and institutional types. The evidence shows substantial progress in women's participation: female students account for 49.7% of total higher-education enrolment, female GER is 31.2 compared with 28.9 for males, and the all-India GPI is 1.08. Female GER has remained above male GER since 2017–18. Female participation is also strong among SC, ST, OBC and minority groups, and in the North-Eastern States female enrolment exceeds male enrolment. Women constitute 44.9% of teachers overall and 40.4% of university-level teachers. Intersectional gaps are also visible among SC, ST, OBC and minority teachers. The paper therefore argues for a shift from enrolment-centred policy to a life-cycle and institution-wide approach involving financial support, safe campuses, mentoring, gender-responsive infrastructure, transparent recruitment and promotion, STEM participation, childcare and measurable accountability.

Keywords: Gender equality, Higher education, Women, AISHE 2023–24, Gender Parity Index, GER, NEP 2020, Faculty representation, Inclusion.

1. Introduction

Higher education distributes knowledge, credentials, employment opportunities, social mobility and cultural authority. In India, its expansion has been accompanied by a significant increase in women's participation. AISHE 2023–24 records about 4.50 crore students in higher education, of whom approximately 2.2 crore, or 49.7%, are female. This represents an important transformation in a system historically influenced by gender, caste, class, geography, family expectations and economic circumstances.

A critical gender study must ask more than how many women enter higher education. It must examine where women are located, which disciplines they enter, whether they continue and progress, and whether they are equally represented among teachers, researchers and institutional leaders. It must also consider whether women from SC, ST, OBC, minority and other disadvantaged groups experience the same opportunities. Gender equality should therefore include access, participation, experience, achievement, progression, representation and institutional voice.

AISHE is valuable because it provides nationally comparable, gender-disaggregated information across enrolment, GER, GPI, social categories, disciplines, staff and institution types.

The present paper uses a critical analytical perspective: it recognizes major gains in student participation but argues that numerical presence should not be equated with complete gender equality. The next stage of policy must focus on enabling women to participate equitably across disciplines, careers, leadership and decision-making.

2. Background of the Study

The gender question in Indian education is linked with wider structures of patriarchy, unequal household labor, economic dependence, early marriage and differential expectations. Expansion of schooling, scholarships, women's colleges, hostels, transport, digital learning and public investment has widened women's educational opportunities. Higher education has consequently become an important route to professional employment, economic independence and social transformation.

AISHE was initiated by the Government of India in 2013, with data beginning in 2010–11, to establish a regular and comprehensive higher-education information system. For 2023–24, 1,289 universities, 48,246 colleges and 15,221 standalone institutions were registered; 1,278 universities, 46,468 colleges and 11,787 standalone institutions responded.

The survey is voluntary, and some institutions may not provide complete responses, which should be considered when interpreting the findings.

The policy context is strongly influenced by NEP 2020, which places equity and inclusion at the Centre of higher education. It calls for gender balance in admissions, financial assistance and scholarships, inclusive curricula, accessible facilities, mentoring and counselling, gender sensitization and enforcement of anti-discrimination and anti-harassment provisions. It also envisages a Gender Inclusion Fund, particularly for girls and transgender students. AISHE indicators can therefore be used to assess progress towards these equity objectives.

3. Review of Literature

Literature on women and higher education in India can broadly be grouped into five themes: access and participation; social stratification and intersectionality; discipline and occupational choice; academic careers and leadership; and institutional climate.

Research on access indicates that expansion has increased women's participation, but household income, distance, safety, mobility, language, social norms and hostel availability continue to affect entry and continuation. Intersectional scholarship emphasizes that gender operates together with caste, tribe, class, religion, disability and region. Overall female enrolment may conceal disadvantages experienced by women at particular social locations.

Another strand examines disciplinary segregation. Women are often strongly represented in education, humanities, social sciences, health-related fields and some biological sciences, while representation can be weaker in engineering, technology and other traditionally male-dominated areas. Discipline choice matters because it influences later employment, earnings, research opportunities and leadership pathways. AISHE reports that females outnumber males in the science stream, but this does not establish equal participation across the entire STEM ecosystem.

Finally, institutional-climate research stresses safety, harassment prevention, sanitation, hostels, childcare, flexibility, mentoring and inclusive curricula. Thus, the central issue is no longer simply whether women can enter higher education, but whether institutions remove structural and cultural barriers affecting women's experiences, choices, progression and authority.

4. Objectives of the Study

- i). To examine gender participation in Indian higher education using AISHE 2023–24.
- ii). To analyze female and male enrolment through GER and GPI.
- iii). To analyze women's representation among teaching and non-teaching staff.
- iv). To identify structural, institutional and socio-cultural challenges affecting gender equality.
- v). To suggest measures for moving from numerical parity towards substantive gender equality.

5. Methodology of the Study

This is a descriptive-analytical seminar study based primarily on secondary data. The principal source is the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2023–24, Ministry of Education, Government of India. Supporting policy interpretation is drawn from NEP 2020 and official Ministry of Education materials.

The study uses indicators including total and female enrolment, GER, GPI, social-category enrolment, disciplinary participation, STEM enrolment, teaching staff and non-teaching staff. Comparative interpretation is made across gender and selected social categories, with trend evidence used where provided by AISHE. The study does not claim causal relationships where AISHE provides only descriptive statistics.

6. Interpretation and Analysis

6.1. Expansion and Female Participation

AISHE 2023–24 records total higher-education enrolment of about 4.50 crore. Female enrolment is about 2.2 crore, or 49.7%, and has increased by 42.2% since 2014–15. Women therefore constitute almost half of the student population.

Key indicators are: overall GER 30.0; male GER 28.9; female GER 31.2; GPI 1.08; female teachers 44.9%; and 82 female teachers per 100 male teachers. These figures demonstrate major progress in participation, while also showing that student parity does not necessarily mean equality in academic employment or leadership.

6.2. GER and Gender Parity

Female GER of 31.2 is higher than male GER of 28.9, producing a GPI of 1.08. GPI has remained above 1 since 2017–18. However, GPI measures participation relative to the eligible population and does not measure quality, subject choice, completion, employment, income, leadership or campus experience. It should therefore be treated as evidence of numerical participation rather than complete equality.

6.3. Gender and Social Categories

Female students constitute 50.3% of SC enrolment, 52.3% of ST enrolment and about 49.9% of OBC enrolment. Female students also outnumber males in the reported Muslim and other-minority categories. Female SC GER is 29.3 and ST GER is 23.7. Nevertheless, the overall ST GER is 22.8, below the national GER of 30.0.

6.4. Regional Dimension

AISHE reports female enrolment above male enrolment in several states, including Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Telangana, Kerala, Haryana, Punjab, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand. In the North-Eastern States as a group, female enrolment is 7.0 lakh compared with 6.2 lakh male enrolment.

6.5. Women in the Academic Workforce

AISHE reports 17,32,294 teachers, of whom 55.1% are male and 44.9% female. There are 82 female teachers per 100 male teachers. Female teachers increased to about 7.8 lakh in 2023–24 from 5.7 lakh in 2014–15. Women constitute 40.4% of university-level teachers and 45.8% of college-level teachers.

Intersectional gaps are sharper: female teachers per 100 male teachers are 66 among SC teachers, 87 among ST teachers, 79 among OBC teachers and 65 among Muslim minority teachers.

6.6. Academic Rank and Institutional Power

Women's presence among teachers is insufficient to establish equality. Progression across ranks, research opportunities and leadership positions are crucial because seniority brings influence over curriculum, research agendas, recruitment, supervision and institutional governance.

6.7. Non-Teaching Staff

AISHE records 15,82,279 non-teaching staff, of whom 41.4% are female. Women constitute 46% of Group A, 47.5% of Group B, 39.8% of Group C and 37.6% of Group D. Gender equality is therefore an institution-wide employment issue, not merely a student issue.

The following tables consolidate the principal AISHE 2023–24 indicators discussed above. They are descriptive summaries of figures reported in this paper and do not imply causal relationships.

Table 1: Key gender indicators in Indian higher education, AISHE 2023–24

Indicator	Female	Male/Comparison	Interpretation
Share of total enrolment	49.7%	Another share: 50.3%	Women account for almost half of higher-education students.
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)	31.2	Male: 28.9; overall: 30.0	Female GER is higher than male GER.
Gender Parity Index (GPI)	1.08	Parity reference: 1.00	Participation is numerically favorable to women on this indicator.
Change in female enrolment since 2014–15	+42.2%	—	Female enrolment has increased substantially.
Female teachers per 100 male teachers	82	Reference: 100 male teachers	Student participation does not translate directly into workforce parity.

Source: Figures reported in the seminar paper from AISHE 2023–24.

Table 2: Gender participation across selected social categories and regions.

Social Category/Region	Female Participation Figure	Additional Indicator	Analysis
Scheduled Castes (SC)	50.3% of SC enrolment	Female SC GER: 29.3	Numerical parity coexists with the need to examine access and progression.
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	52.3% of ST enrolment	Female ST GER: 23.7; overall ST GER: 22.8	Parity within a category does not remove lower overall participation.
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	About 49.9% of OBC enrolment	—	Participation is close to parity.
North-Eastern States	Female: 7.0 lakh	Male: 6.2 lakh	Regional aggregate shows higher female than male enrolment.
Assam and other listed states	Female enrolment exceeds male enrolment in several states	Includes Assam, Bihar, West Bengal and others	National averages can conceal regional differences.

Source: AISHE 2023–24 figures as reported in the seminar paper.

Table 3: Gender representation in higher-education employment.

Workforce Indicator	Female Representation	Comparison/Breakdown	Critical Interpretation
All teachers	44.9% (about 7.8 lakh)	Total: 17,32,294; 55.1% male	Women are a smaller share of teachers than of students.
University-level teachers	40.4%	College-level teachers: 45.8%	Female representation is lower at university level.
Female teachers per 100 male teachers: SC	66	ST: 87	Intersectional gaps vary by social category.
Female teachers per 100 male teachers: OBC	79	Muslim minority: 65	Some groups show particularly large representation gaps.
Non-teaching staff	41.4% overall	Group A: 46%; B: 47.5%; C: 39.8%; D: 37.6%	Gender equality requires attention across institutional employment.

Source: AISHE 2023–24 figures as reported in the seminar paper.

7. Major Findings

- Female students constitute 49.7% of total higher-education enrolment.
- Female GER is 31.2 compared with 28.9 for males; GPI is 1.08.
- Female GER has exceeded male GER since 2017–18.
- Female enrolment has increased substantially since 2014–15.
- Females constitute 50.3% of SC and 52.3% of ST enrolment.
- Female OBC enrolment is approximately 49.9%.
- Female students outnumber males in the reported minority categories.
- Female enrolment exceeds male enrolment in several states, including Assam.
- Women are strongly represented in science, but broader STEM equality requires attention.
- Women constitute 44.9% of teachers compared with 49.7% of students.
- Women constitute 40.4% of university-level teachers and 45.8% of college-level teachers.
- Faculty gaps are particularly visible among some intersectional categories, showing the need to move from access-centered policy towards progression, leadership and research

8. Suggestions

- Scholarships, fee support, transport, hostels and targeted outreach should be strengthened for students facing economic, geographic or social barriers.

- Institutions should annually report gender-disaggregated admission, retention, completion, discipline, scholarship, research, placement, recruitment, promotion and leadership indicators.
- Transparent recruitment and promotion, mentoring, leadership development, research support and fair allocation of academic responsibilities can help identify and reduce career slowdowns.
- Mentoring, scholarships, bridge programmes, laboratories, internships and visible women role models can support participation in engineering, technology, computing and research-intensive fields.
- NEP provisions on gender balance, financial assistance, inclusive curricula, accessible facilities, mentoring, counselling, sensitization and anti-harassment measures should be translated into annual institutional action plans with budgets, indicators and timelines.
- Institutions should ensure effective grievance redressal, awareness of rights, confidential reporting, counselling, adequate lighting and safe transport.
- Childcare support, reasonable flexibility and family-sensitive arrangements can address structural barriers affecting women's academic progression.
- Policies should distinguish women by caste, tribe, minority status, disability, poverty and geography. Disaggregated data should guide scholarships, mentoring and recruitment.
- Institutions should strengthen data governance and timely reporting. Gender-disaggregated information should be publicly available at meaningful levels while protecting privacy.

9. Policy Implementation Framework

- At the national level, the Ministry/UGC and concerned agencies should monitor Gender Inclusion Fund support and beneficiaries. States should develop gender-equity action plans using GER, GPI, retention and completion indicators.
- Institutions should maintain annual gender-equity plans covering admission, retention, faculty, leadership and research.
- Campuses should maintain safety and inclusion systems, while regulatory bodies and institutions should publish annual gender-disaggregated dashboards.
- Implementation should be continuous rather than project-based. Institutions should establish a baseline, set annual targets, allocate resources, review outcomes and publish a short gender-equity report.
- Accreditation and quality-assurance processes can incorporate these indicators so gender equality becomes part of institutional performance.

10. Conclusion

AISHE 2023–24 demonstrates a significant transformation in gender participation in Indian higher education. Women account for almost half of all students; female GER is higher than male GER and the GPI is above one. Female participation is also substantial among SC, ST, OBC and minority students, while several states and the North-Eastern region show female enrolment above male enrolment. These are important achievements.

India's future gender agenda in higher education should shift from access alone to substantive equality: equal opportunities to enter, remain, succeed, research, publish, lead and

influence institutions. NEP 2020 provides a strong policy foundation through its emphasis on equity, gender balance, financial assistance, inclusive curricula, mentoring, accessibility, gender sensitization and anti-harassment mechanisms. The central challenge is implementation—turning policy commitments into funded, measurable and accountable institutional practices. Gender-equitable higher education is ultimately a question of educational quality, social justice, economic development and democratic citizenship.

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