

Women in Leadership Role in Higher Education- Kaleidoscope of Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Women are playing a vital role in high managerial position in all industries. The same is desired, in the opinion of scholars, who advocate that there needs to be a diverse perspective at decision making table and hence moot for women's voices in higher education. But numerous studies over the period of time have presented the evidence of the under representation of women in leadership roles and higher education is not oblivious of this. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) was established by the United Nation with the aim of improving gender equality and the empowerment of women, which was followed by the sustainable development Goal which reiterated the same. National laws are not a remiss, for example under Article 15(3) in the Constitution of India provides special powers in the hands of lawmakers to protect the representation of women which is substantiated by the numerous precedents.

Along with the national and international policies, the leadership role played by women in higher education is affected by a multitude of factors and attributes that also play very crucial part in defining the limits of their role. This article aims at assessing a kaleidoscopic perspective on the leadership role played by the women in the higher education sector as well as understanding the societal-cultural and organization's culture as attributes which are influencing the aspirations and opportunities of women to be or to remain in leadership roles. This article would briefly analyze international instruments, national laws and institutional policies which are aimed at removing the barriers to progression of women in higher education and will go on to discuss the various case studies and judicial perspective on having diverse voices at the decision making table and how can we increase the visibility and engagement of women at leadership role in higher education.

Keywords: Leadership, MDG, SGD, HEIs & Right to equality.

Introduction

Girls and Women seldom complete their high school education let alone pursuing a higher education in colleges and universities. The dropout rates, social stigma and many other restraints of the like are higher and hence there is a declining trend of women pursuing higher education which is across different disciplines. Inadvertently historical and cultural notion of sexual division of labor has defined the limits of leadership role played by the women in society for long, but in the postmodern world, women are playing vital role in high managerial positions in all industries and communities, same is desired in the opinion of scholars, who advocates diverse perspective at decision making table and moot for women's representation.¹In spite of this rise in the leadership role that women are playing globally, various researchers and studies over the period of time have presented the evidence of the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in business and politics were only 0.5% of women are being CEOs, 26.5% of them are holding board seat in the organization and only 36.9% of women are appointed at senior- level in USA,² globally these figure are far worse and higher education institutes are no exception.

Around the World there have been various case studies which are aimed at relocating the leadership role of women and gender equality in higher education, one such work is reflected in the special issue titles "Perspective on Women's Higher Education Leadership from Around the World".³ This issues offers varied

perspective on the leadership role played by the women in developed as well as developing countries including USA, Australia, China, UK, India and Saudi Arabia. These studies explore the attributes such as organizational culture, environment, strategies, institutional model, and national laws and subsequent policies. These study identifies the socio-cultural barrier and dogmas which are faced by women in academic leadership roles.

The Millennium Development Goal (MDG), was established by the United Nation, with eight goals one among them being promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women,⁴ which was followed by the sustainable development Goal which emphasized equal access to education, decent work, representation in politics and economic decision making.⁵ Similarly national laws have also formulated the women favoring legislation which can at least secure their representation, for example the constitution of India under Article 15(3) provides special powers in the hands of lawmakers to protect the representation of women,⁶ which has been again substantiated by the number of judicial pronouncement.⁷

The leadership role played by women in higher education is affected by a multitude of factors and attributes, one of such attributes is “organizational culture” which impacts the aspiration or willingness to move into or remain in leadership position. This organizational culture influences the willingness of women considering leadership opportunities⁸. One of the considerable factors here can be the gender equality scheme which is supported by the policies related with the harassment, bullying, and leave flexibility, working hours, promotion criteria and reward procedures.⁹ Gender stereotype by society, day-to-day housework responsibility and sexual division of labor has created a normative belief or dogma over the course of time which assigns different kind of task to different genders this dogma is the root cause of gender discrimination.¹⁰ Despite the numerous governmental reforms for the promotion of women empowerment the ratio of women who are playing leadership role is stunt, higher education sector is too enduring the same misshape. Review of literature reveals that gender in leadership in higher education institutions have been breeding two myths. The first being about the vision of objectivity and neutrality of organizations. It can be observed that there is a very banal and blatant apparent example of social constructions, where higher management would not ideally prefer women to be in decision making positions. Gender neutrality for diversity hires is a sad reality, but a reality nonetheless. The second myth is that women who ultimately pursue higher education are elitist and belonging to a privileged class and as a consequence do not suffer in academia. This doesn't divorce from the fact that academia also, like other professions undergoes a gendered process which breeds more gender differences and inequalities, because the reality of academia is that gender inequality is embedded in it too. Women are excluded from certain kinds of masculine disciplines of work and face what can be termed as “informal invisibility”. The notion that there are a very few women in leadership positions in administrative positions in higher education institutions is a result of perpetuating social constructs and constraints of socialization which is apparent in the systemic framework as well.¹¹

This article aims at assessing a kaleidoscopic perspective on the leadership role played by the women in the higher education sector as well as understanding the socio-cultural and organization's culture as attributes which are influencing the aspirations and opportunities of women to be or to remain in leadership roles, along with this article would briefly analyze international instruments, national laws and institutional policies which are aimed at removing the barriers to progression of women in higher education. To begin with, the article will explain the importance of women in leadership roles through the help of various case studies which are already in place and the barrier to their progression. The article will go on to elaborate upon the various international instruments, national laws and policy initiatives taken at the institutional level, which would be followed by discussion on why it is important to have diverse voices and perspectives at the decision-making table and how can we increase the visibility and engagement of women at leadership role in higher education.

The Feminist Perspective

Colleges and universities are ultimately institutions that are co-educational and patterned on masculine-esque ideas of merit. There is seldom any feminist agenda behind higher educational institutions. While entertaining the idea of educating women to attain higher education is in itself frowned upon, it may still add some fodder to the concepts of feminism. But reiterating, the shocking reality is that the survival of educational institutions is entirely dependent on conventional systems and frameworks that conform to the higher education management norms accepted globally. In the article titled “Role of Women's higher education institutions in international contexts”, authored by Kristen A. Renn, purports a unique hypothesis that encouraging to establish institutions founded and maintained by women to educate women. This underscores a new idea that more and more women-run higher education institutions will eventually succeed in breaking barriers in women achieving managerial and administrative positions. To put it simply this idea is from a feminist standpoint that does away with the traditional concepts of higher-level management. It introduces a new perspective that if countries are aspiring to encourage women empowerment with special reference to higher education institutions, then it shall ultimately achieve the aspiration.¹²

The feminist perspective to understanding women in higher education is altruistic in its goal but achievable if really desired. This point of view highlights that the need for more women run institutions to encourage women in leadership as well. Feminism finds its roots in the traditional equality and so this jurisprudential aspect seeks to suggest that a change in the basic educational framework can have a ripple effect in the change it brings in empowering women. The conventional higher educational institutions work on a patented infrastructure and

administration as well, and needless to say this framework is very masculine. If we are to achieve a target that in its inception is frowned upon and considered taboo, the path to this target is paved with difficulties to say the least. The feminist perspective in an ideology that shows promise. Renn in her article has conducted thorough research comparatively analyzing the various women run and all women higher educational institutions across the globe and exploring the various implications it poses. The findings of her paper purports five emerging issues namely the role women play in colleges and universities as employees, the gender biasness, leadership development initiatives and the paradoxes that lie with it as well, access to resources and campus climate. Women's institutions provide access to higher education better than other traditional universities globally. Gender empowerment is very apparent and explicit in such institutions. One of the most vehement examples is that of colleges affiliated with Delhi University like Miranda House and Lady Shri Ram that are women run institution for female students only and can be credited with some of the smartest leaders in the world and have a notable alumnus.

Policy Framework for Women equality and Empowerment in higher education

There are various international instruments which are aimed at securing the equal right of women and promoting women empowerment, key among them are Convention on elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) ¹³which emphasizes on the full development and advancement of women. Article 14 and 15 of this convention asserts the full equality of women in civil, political and business matters. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals adopted by world leaders in the year 2015¹⁴ aims for gender equality and women's empowerment to be an integral part of all the 17 goals.¹⁵ Sustainable Development Goal number five, followed by its targets, aims to achieve gender equality and to provide equal opportunity to women and girls in all forms including their representation on the decision making table. Equal opportunity for women in the leadership role is a fundamental part of gender equality and empowerment which is goal 5 of Millennium Development Goal, this MDG 5 address the issues like equality in education, participation in non-traditional work and representation of women in the decision making process at all governmental level.¹⁶

Women in higher education and especially in administrative positions are harbingers of change and yet they are very small in number. The sheer invisibility and near absence of women in higher management is deep rooted in our worlds. The principle of gender equality however has paved its way from international instruments to the national legal framework, right to equality and equal protection of law enshrined under Constitution of India is for instance is role model for encouraging the women to take up leadership role. The Preamble of constitution of India provides for, "Equality of status and of opportunity" which makes all the gender at par.¹⁷ Fundamental right under Article 14, 15, 15(3) and under Article 16 grants equality to women and also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women.¹⁸

And Directive principle of state policy, directs the state to provide equal opportunity and an adequate means to livelihood to both men and women, equal pay for equal work and maternity relief to women under Article 39(a), 39(d), and 42.¹⁹

Reservation of one-third number of seat for women through direct election in panchayat and municipality under article 243(D)(3) and 243(T)(3) and reservation of office of chairman for women in these two institutions under article 243(D)(4) and 243(T)(4) is another provision which facilitates the equal opportunity and representation of women in leadership role²⁰. Other than the constitutional provisions there are few legislations which have been enacted in India to provide the equal opportunity and secure the representation of women in leadership role, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 being one such legislature, makes it a requisite for the employers that they mandatorily pay equal to men and women alike for work that cannot be distinguished. Never will we find that during the process of recruitment, or after in the conditions of the employment such as promotion, training, transfer etc. does an employer discriminate against the female employees. This is subject to the exception that any legislative statute prohibits any specific nature of work. The POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act) 2013 iterates the definition of sexual harassment at work places and also the remedies available against it. This encourages women to be employed and earn and not just a means to fulfill necessity, but also ensuring that their workplace protects their dignity.

The 1961 Maternity Benefits Act, is a legislative endeavor that has provisions enshrined which regulate the fixed period of maternity leaves and some other allied benefits which further negates the society's normative dogma, where womanhood is primary associated with the motherhood and the responsibilities that comes thereafter overpowering the role of women, that they play in their profession, resulting in giving upper hand to the other gender.

Women's Reservation Bill or the Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, is a pending bill in India which proposes to amend the Constitution of India to reserve 33 per cent of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament of India, the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women.

There is long line of progression of the women's reservation bills in our country, dating as far back as 1979. The Constitution 108th Amendment Bill, 2023 titled "Women's Reservation Bill" was proposed to reserve one-third of all seats in the Lower House of the Parliament, in all State Legislative Assemblies including NCT Delhi and also reserving SCs and STs seats as well. This Bill is now a statute titled "Women's Reservation Act, 2023" which validates the Parliament's endeavour and commitment to increase women representation in politics.

NCW (National Commission for Women), 1992 is a specialised statutory body which was established with the aim of reviewing, monitoring and provide suggestions for the laws related to protection and empowerment of women and to suggest amendments wherever necessary. The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000) was adopted with the objective to ensure the survival, protection and development of girl child. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001, was prepared by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, to bring advancement, development and empowerment of women.

Even after these many protective provisions and progressive policies India's standing for the equal opportunity and representation of women is mixed. The policy brief on "Achieving equal rights and opportunity for women and girls", elucidate that India aspires to achieve its targeted levels in girl's education and literacy, but still struggles on improving women's economic empowerment.

India has strived to achieve the target of eliminating gender disparity in primary education and striving to achieve the equal opportunity in secondary as well as tertiary education. Through the different initiatives and policies, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) saw a rise from 0.76 in 1990/91 and crossed parity (1.01) in primary education in 2011/12 (an increase of 33%); it increased from 0.60 to 0.93 (55%) in secondary education; and from 0.54 to 0.88 (63%) in higher education, in the same period. In the year 2021/22 the GPI is similar to that of 211/12 in higher education which is 1.01. In the year 2017/18 the GPI was at 1.01, 1.05 in 2018/19, 1.06 in 2019/20, 1.05 again in 202/21 and again at 1.01 in 2021/22 across all social categories.²¹

The AISHE report, in the 2021-22 says that Women's enrolment in higher education has increased to 43.3 million which is a 4.6% increase since 2020-21 when it was 41.4 million. Total number of PhD enrolment has increased to 81.2% in 2021-22 (21.3 million) from 2014-15 (11.7 million). The enrolment of women in PhD has doubled in 2021-22 since 2014-15 from a steep increase of 0.99 lakh from 0.48 lakh.²²

The aggregate of teaching staff in higher education has increased from 14,16,299 in 2018-19 to 15.98 lakh in 2021-2022. Out of these, 56.6% are males and 43.4% are females. The increment in the number of female faculty has increased by a 22% since 2014-15. The number of teachers has increased by 46,618 in 2021-22 over 2020-21. At an all-India, nation level, there are 78 female teachers per 100 male teachers in 2021-22. Amongst the non-teaching employees, the mean of females per 100 males is 78 in 2021-22 as compared to when it was 49 in 2018-19.²³

The Global Gender Gap Report of 2023 by the World Economic Forum is indicative of still existent and apparent gender disparity across four verticals namely employment opportunities, education and academics, health and political representation. The 2023 reveals some very saddening statistics. It says that it would take a better part of one and half century i.e., until 2158 to achieve full gender parity which would mean that over five generations would have passed since the targeted Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) in 2030.²⁴

What this is indicative of is affirming the point that though we have come a long way in facilitating gender equality, longer road ahead awaits.

Equal opportunity and women empowerment: Judicial approach

The constitutional courts through the help of judicial review and judicial activism, have evolved a gender jurisprudence which gives substance and life to the constitutional scheme of protective discrimination in favor of women.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court dealing with the Equality of Opportunity in the matter of Education, observed that Article 15(3) is an exception engrafted to clause (1) of the Article 15. Thus, in view of the Article 15(3) reservation for women cannot be denied and is affirmative right.²⁵ Similar observation was made in the landmark judgement of Sukhdeo v. Government of Andhra Pradesh²⁶, where court held that reservation under sports quota for women does not offend the provisions of Articles 15(1) and 29(2) of the Constitution. Reservation of women in the medical college was upheld, court held this kind of reservation is protected under article 15(3) as reasonable classification.²⁷

Apex court, called on the sex prejudice against the Indian womanhood which pervades the service rules and held that, "If a woman member shall obtain the permission of Government before the marriage, the same applies to male member who contracts a marriage. If the family and domestic commitments of a woman member of the service is likely to come in the way of efficient discharge of duties, a similar situation may well arise in the case of a male member."²⁸

In the case of *Air India v. Nargesh Meerza*,²⁹ regulation requiring airhostesses to retire on marriage, first pregnancy, or the age of 35, whichever occurred earlier was challenged as being violative of article 14, 15 and 16 court quashed the offending regulations, upholding the principle of equality of status and of opportunity. In the recent case of the Secretary, Ministry of Defense v. Babita Puniya and others, Supreme Court ruled that all women army officers are now eligible for permanent commissions and are at par with men when it comes to promotion, ranks, benefits and pensions.

Through the various cases such as *Peoples Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India*,³⁰ *Randhir Singh v. Union of India*,³¹ *Sanjit Roy v. State of Rajasthan*³², *Uttarakhand Mahila Kalyan Parishad v. State of Uttar Pradesh*³³, Judiciary has enforced and strengthen the constitutional mandate of "equal pay for equal work" enshrined in Article 39(d), which is implicit under Article 14 of the Constitution. In doing such, court has brought the equal remuneration within the contours of fundamental right to equality which affirmative action

in promoting women empowerment and encouraging the women to aspire the leadership role in all industries including the higher education Institution which are the building block of societies.

Leadership Role of women in higher education: Attributes and Aspirations

As discussed above, globally there have been various case studies which are aimed at locating and relocating the leadership role of women and gender equality in higher education, in developed as well as developing countries including USA, Australia, China, UK, India and Saudi Arabia. The main objective of these studies is to quantify and explore the cultural, societal, organizational attributes including environment, strategies, institutional model to identifies the socio-cultural barrier and dogmas which are faced by women in academic leadership roles.

One such study was conducted by Longman titled, "How Organizational Culture Shapes Women's Leadership Experiences"³⁴ where author analyzed the experience of 16 women who are working in the different faith-based college and universities in USA. Through the experience of these women, author explores the impact of organizational culture and traditions in shaping the role of women in institutes. Longman justifies the selection of faith-based institutes by saying that male- normed leadership structure are in sync with the theological commitments which have dominant views on the gender roles. This study identifies organizational culture as one of the attribute which pulls or pushes the women towards the leadership role in higher educational institution.

"Ascending: An Exploration of Women's Leadership Advancement in the Role of Board of Trustee Chair,"³⁵ by Scott is another commendable study which explores the skill that women have identified as essential to ascent to the leadership role including that of trustee and governing body in an educational institutes by conducting in-person interviews. Study emphasized on the women's leadership development programming as strategic road ahead to prepare the future generation women for the leadership roles in higher education institutes.

Vicary and Jones, in their research article "The Implications of Contractual Terms of Employment for Women and Leadership: An Autoethnographic Study in UK Higher Education"³⁶ focused on the structure of higher education in United Kingdom. The work discusses theoretical and practical implication of contractual short terms of employment, author find this set-up as a barrier in the progression of women in higher education institutes given the large number of female employees are employed under these terms of employment which are contributing towards lowered self-esteem and dampen aspiration to lead. Another study from United Kingdom talks about the UK Equality Act, 2010 with the focus on section 159 of the act which provides for preferential treatment of underrepresented group which includes the female gender as well. This article identifies the national law and institutional policies such as recruitment criteria, promotion requirement as one the key attribute which defines the role played by the women in higher education. Another interesting study involves the interview of 18 senior women from different generation, claims that leadership aspiration of women are negatively impacted by the job insecurity and continuous organizational restructuring.³⁷

According to the Higher Education Funding Council for England Business Plan 2015-2020, talks about setting aspirations of accommodating 40% women representation in higher education institutions' governing bodies and management, nevertheless, women in the UK have accounted for that they have some stages of their academic careers faced gendered discrimination. They attribute this to very concept of leadership in high education institutions as being very narrowly defined and male dominated. There are a lot of other factors that contribute to this gender disparity and ultimately a decline in women leadership. These have been termed as "invisible barriers". In order to achieve these aspirational goals of eliminating gender disparity, it is important to acknowledge institutionalized sexism as well as gendered construction of academic excellence. Women tend to find it harder to excel in leadership roles because of the apparent lack of adequate support. More often than not academic institutions also tend justify doing sexist hiring by attributing to women having poor academic credit. It is imperative to mention here that merit is subjective and not everyone can be judged on the exam same parameters. It is clearly indicative of the fact that women in higher education battle gender stereotypes and it is severely impacting their excelling in leadership roles.

The UK Equality Act of 2010 enshrines provisions that aims to strengthen equality. Section 158 and Section 159 are very akin to Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution of India that talk about opting for positive action measures to underprivileged sects of the society. As is the case in India, in the UK, these provisions are viewed as "reverse discrimination". There is ambiguity in understanding the very nature and intended aim of these provisions despite having received guidance from the Office of Equalities by the UK Government. This shows that despite having legislative endeavors, there is still a long way to go to achieve the aspiration of completely eradicating the gender disparity in higher education institutions.³⁸

A study titled, "Towards Social Justice in Institutions of Higher Learning: Addressing Gender Inequality in Science & Technology through Capability Approach "³⁹ by Kameshwar and Shukla provide a rich perspective on the leadership role played by the women in Indian Higher education Institution. Authors analyzes the qualitative data by conducting interview of 40 faculty and staff of south Indian university to identify the socio-cultural barriers faced by the women. Though this study is focusing on the science and technological disciplines but social sciences is no exception when it comes to normative dogmas. Author reports that historically and culturally a public-private divide has been associated with the gender roles in India. Female role viewed in private domain of household whereas male's role is identified with the authority and societal productivity and

how this dogma has contributed in the underrepresentation of women in all sectors including higher education. Author through the qualitative data identified the socio-psychological obstruction that women faced in the research funding and educational opportunities, along with this implication of stereotypical discrimination author stresses on the identifying and building the capabilities such as self-esteem, motivation, administrative and decision-making approach that can remove this gender disparity in Higher Education Institution.

Capacity Building Initiative for Women in Higher Education

There is now a dire need of formulation of a programme to build the capacity of women to encourage and enhance their professional proficiency and break the glass ceiling. The National Education Policy of 1986 focused on empowering women through educational systems so as to promote equality. This policy recognized that it is imperative that women move up to the top and they must be enabled with all kinds of support and help. In 1997, under aegis of University Grants Commission in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat of London, the Capacity Building Programme was set up to conduct workshops to train women in efficient management and administration of higher educational institutions. The objectives of these workshops are two-fold, the empowerment of women as well as increasing sensitivity and inclusivity of higher education institutions. The programme focused in five verticals- educational perspective, governance, academic leadership, research and professional proficiencies. Even though there is restrictive parameters but the outcomes were several.

Taking inspiration from the same, there needs to be programmes set up to specifically provide training and specialized guidance to women in higher management and administrative skills. They must be made equipped with the understanding the issues concerning leadership, power play, good governance and also effective time management. It is imperative to provide women with access to better higher education to compete with their coeducational counterparts. This is not without challenge hence, access to better higher education here is in the context of women in academia that need more training and more leadership initiatives to participate in. Women tend to sway more towards comfort. These comforts could be of a secure job, in a comfortable town and setting and hence diminish the desire to move up the leadership ladder. Women also need to be sensitized of their own capabilities and caliber. They need to be shook to understand that any or many kind of government or otherwise initiatives cannot bear fruits until they are ready to come to terms of the actualization of “access to higher education”. They are on the precipice of wonder and success that can change their career trajectories and hence need to have adequate support from their families, their peers, their mentors and most importantly their institutions that can instill the encouragement and strength they need to excel in leadership roles.⁴⁰

Conclusion

International community and national legal framework have time and again ensured the elimination of gender disparity in all spheres including higher education, but inspire of these reforms and laws the desired outcome has yet not been received but the progress in the direction cannot be overlooked. Other than the legal framework, leadership role played by women in higher education is affected by a multitude of factors and attributes, including “organizational culture” which impacts the aspiration or willingness of women to move into or remain in leadership position. This organizational culture is influenced by the theological, cultural and societal norms which have large part to play in the leadership opportunities provided to the women. Gender equality scheme can be considerable attribute as per the studies which is supported by the policies related with the harassment, bullying, and leave flexibility, working hours, promotion criteria and reward procedures. Gender stereotype by society, day-to-day housework responsibility and sexual division of labor has created a normative belief or dogma over the course of time which assigns different kind of task to different genders this dogma is the root cause of gender discrimination. In conclusion diverse perspective of women in decision making is fundamental, ad this participation at desired level can only be achieved when governmental policies, Institutional behavior ad societal norms are in sync. Along with this, woman are also required to identify the capabilities such as self-esteem, motivation, administrative and decision making approach that can remove this gender disparity in Higher education Institution.

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