

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

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5.1 Summary of Major Findings

Major findings of the study are summarized as follows:

- The period 1990-08 of Vidyasagar University has witnessed an enormous expansion of enrolment in post-graduations both for male and females. The period when divided in three parts i.e. 1990-96, 1996-2002 and 2002-08 showed that the growth of enrolment has been quite higher in the later periods than in the former period.
- The rate of growth of enrolment of female post-graduates has been quite higher than that of male post-graduates. It has resulted in increasing fairly relative proportion in total enrolment. But still they are lagging far behind than males.
- Growth indices of female enrolments are higher than male counterpart in the all faculties of Arts, Science and Commerce. The growth index of female post-graduates in the faculty of commerce was the maximum. But, female post-graduates in Commerce accounts for only 1%. However, the growth index of female post-graduates in Science was larger than the growth index of female post-graduates in Arts and it was primarily because higher female enrolments in soft sciences such as Physiology, Botany, Zoology and Anthropology.
- In the Arts faculty, more inequality in favour of males prevails in the subjects of Economics, B. Lib. Sc and M. Lib. Sc. For female post-graduate students, Philosophy has emerged as the subject with the highest enrolment proportions since 1990-91. For males, English was the first choice.
- About 64% of the male post-graduates were enrolled in the subjects of Mathematics, Physics and chemistry whereas more than 70% of female post-graduates enrolled in the subjects of soft sciences.

- In the case of female post-graduates, enrolment percentage increased in the faculty of Arts, Science and Commerce and consequently, in the case of male students, this was decreased in the field of arts, science and commerce. It is basically due to the decrease in enrolments of OTHERS males (i.e. non-SC/ST) which are also continuously decreasing.
- Among all the social groups' females, OTHERS females are most prominent. It can aptly be supported by their respective growth indices and trend.
- The lowest inequality in enrolment is observed in the case of "OTHERS" which is equivalent to the half of the total of SC inequality index and ST inequality index.
- Gender parity in higher education in terms of enrolment is more in the case ST than that of SC social group .However, it needs to mention, ST female enrolment in relation to total enrolment amounts.67% only.
- There are *only one* female and *two* male students in Economics; *two* females in the B. Lib.Sc and *five* males and *three* females in the M. Lib.Sc for the social group ST during the entire 18 years period under study. Hence, ST social group is in a worst position in respect of enrolments in Economics, B. Lib.Sc and M. Lib.Sc.
- Female students belonged to SC and ST from Science and Commerce faculty constitutes only 1.15% of the total enrolments.
- During the period 1990-08, women's access to higher education for all social groups and ST males were characterized by clustering in the so-called "feminine", "non-professional" and "non-market" courses and, on the other hand, OTHERS males and SC males access to higher education was characterized by clustering in the so-called "masculine", "professional" and "market" courses. Within Arts faculty, more than 40% of female post-graduate (i.e. 37% belonging to OTHERS; 3% belonging to SC and 1% belonging to ST) were clustering in the subjects of Philosophy and Political Science and within Science, more than 70% of female

post-graduates (i.e.63 % belonging to OTHERS; 6 % belonging to SC and 1 % belonging to ST) were enrolled in the soft-sciences viz. Botany, Zoology, Physiology and Anthropology.

- Both male and female post-graduates appreciate the utility of girls' education.
- Most male post-graduates think that 'male and female cannot be assigned same duties /responsibilities' and 'both do not have similar intelligence and abilities'. Nearly half of post-graduate females support it.
- The age-old notion of gender division of labor still prevails in their mind which has made household management as the main activity of women. This sets the priority of women's work outside home as secondary, whereas for men, work outside home, is primarily for livelihood.
- Students perceive that 'Teaching' jobs are by far the best jobs for females because they find it easier to balance among their multiple roles as mothers, wives and employees.
- A sharp contrast exists between male and female perceptions about the traits and attributes of human being needed for quality of life where human dignity is respected. Both respondents think 'sturdy' as essentially male trait and 'Independent' as common trait. Both male and female respondents think that 'Shy' 'passive' under 'submissiveness' domain is essentially feminine. However, the opinions of post-graduate males with respect to equal access to resources and desirable traits for women are basically conservative than post-graduate females.

5.2 Discussion and Conclusion

The period 1990-08 witnessed an enormous expansion of enrolment in post-graduates but it has been more profound for females as compared to males. This finding corroborates with the finding from other recent researches (Marjit, 2012). It also shows that 63% of the post-graduates are males and 37% of the post-graduates are females. A total of 14.81%

SC and 2.43% ST post-graduate students have enrolled during the period which may be viewed against the representation of SCs and STs in the total population of West Bengal, which is 23.02% for SCs and 5.5% for STs (Census, 2001). The post-graduate enrolments percentage are less than their reservation quota (i.e. 22% for SC and 6% for ST in West Bengal). The policy of reservation for the socially disadvantaged groups has undoubtedly opened the doors of higher education for them. But at the same time, the enrolment data indicate the necessity of public and private initiative for raising the level of academic attainment at the lower levels of education, so that the quota at the higher levels do not remain unfulfilled.

Female students belonged to SC and ST from Science and Commerce faculty constitutes only 1.15% of the total enrolments which is still considerably low. But the development of Science based skills is an important part of social transformation. More importantly, the knowledge constructed through the use of scientific rationality infuses and shapes prevailing socio-political and economic institutions as well as the most intimate parts of our lives (Poonacha, 2005).

Enrolment of women in higher education is still lagging behind that of their male counterparts and registered disproportionately for biological and non-quantitative social sciences as compared to mathematics and pure sciences (Dandapat & Sengupta, 2012). This finding is also in agreement with the results of earlier researches (Chanana, 2004; Chakraborty, 2009). A considerable number of researched works have been generated to explain the causes and consequences of women's under-representation in science and technology in higher education (Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, & Uzzi, 2000; European Commission, 2000; Fielding, Glover, & Smeaton, 1997; Greenwood, 2000; Rose, 1998). Even then, why has education been unequal accessible to women for decades and also confined in traditional fields? Part of the answer lies on the supply side – there is clearly a lack of adequate and sensitive educational efforts to mobilize women, involve them in the educational process and help them reflect critically on their lives. The other side of the problem lies in women's lack of will, self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness to demand education.

Indeed, gender inequality in higher education is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems in our society—inequalities in mortality, natality, basic facility, special opportunity, profession, ownership and household (Sen, 2001). The different forms of gender inequality can impose diverse adversities on the lives of men and boys, in addition to those of women and girls. In understanding the different aspects of the evil of gender inequality, we have to look beyond the predicament of women and examine the problems created for men as well by the asymmetric treatment of women (Sen, 2001). Gender inequalities exist because of discrimination in the family and societal institutions and social, cultural, and religious norms that perpetuate stereotypes, practices and beliefs that are detrimental to women.

The present study attempts to investigate post-graduate students' perceptions about utility of girls' education, behaviors, occupations and expected traits of men and women in our society with an aim to examine the influence of gender stereotyping on women's higher education and also, to find out whether higher education as an instrument of liberation or servitude. Perception of something is the way that anybody conceives about it or recognizes it using own senses (Ganguly, 2006). Perception has been considered as the phenomenon understanding the personal autonomy which refers here to a student's sense of self-determination, of being able to make choices regarding the direction of his or her actions. It is likely that student's perceptions of utility of girls' education will reflect women's longstanding marginalization from higher education (Solomon, 1985), especially since attitudes and perceptions on any issue are influenced by a variety of historical, social, and cultural factors (e.g., Frank, 2004; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). The perception of the importance of girls' education seems to affect enrolments (Bandopadhyay & Subramanian, 2008) and also subject choices (Bowman & Hudson, 2006). Evidence has shown that educating women can lead to improved economic and social outcomes (Wolfe & Zuvekas, 1997). Specifically, recent empirical work, which has mainly focused on developing countries, shows that there are both positive economic consequences and social externalities arising from improving women's education. For example, enhancing the educational status of women have been associated with reductions in fertility (Subbarao & Raney, 1995; Kingdon, 2002; Osili & Long, 2008), decreases in infant mortality and increases in life expectancy (Behrman &

Deolalikar, 1988; Schutlz, 1993; Dancer et al., 2008), improves children's health and nutritional status (Thomas, 1990; Mehrotra, 2006), likely to participate in political meetings (UNESCO, 2000) and greater impact of children's schooling (Filmer, 2006). As mentioned earlier, this study indicates that overall post-graduate students perceive the utility of girls' education. This result is similar to the study of Bowman and Hudson (2006). Utility of girls' education and its relevance depends very much on their expectations of a student's future role and how education contributes to this role. These expectations seem very much to be rooted in traditional perceptions of gender role ideals.

The role of women is a function of three major forces - social institutions, women's access to resources, and the abilities (Morrisson & Jutting, 2005; Sen, 2001; World Bank, 2001). The core idea behind this framework is that the role of women in developing countries is heavily influenced by social institutions, the key important factor for gender inequality (World Bank, 2001) which includes social norms, codes of conduct, informal laws and traditions. Social institutions may impose direct constraints on women's activities, for instance, by not allowing them to start their own businesses. They might also impose indirect constraints to women via a limited access to resources that are essential to join the labor market in particular health and education (Morrisson & Jutting, 2005) and the level of abilities which includes issues as psychological obstacles or lack of social support (Jacobs, 1996).

Women's access to resources also influences their economic role. Women with better education and access to health care as well as to the labor market will be more likely to get wage employment or highly qualified jobs than those excluded from these resources (Morrisson & jutting, 2005). Equal education, equal amount of food, equal health and medical care, similar occupations and equal wages constitute the data set for access to resources. From this study the researcher can see that 6% of male post-graduates think that girls and boys do not need equal education and 17% of male post-graduates and 4 % of females do not think that both need equal amount of food. Male members of a family are not aware about the intake of food of female members in the family. A new Study report supports this by stating that the nutrition advantage girls have over boys in the first few months of life seems to be reversed over time as they grow older (The Hindu, 1

January 2012). "Women are eating last, the least and the left over. Nourishing and balanced diet is as a male prerogative. Daughters and brides kept on starvation diet. Food secured middle-aged women as honorary men" (Patel, 2006).

Social institutions aggregate seven different variables in all. It includes the right to freedom, the right to profession, the right to share of household responsibilities and the right of ownership. All these variables have an economic impact. But an independent income of women increased their self-reliance, reduced their dependency on household income and helped them to stand on their own feet (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004; Morrisson & Jutting, 2005) and also an important factor for development (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999). Sen (1999) argues that the goal of development is not to achieve a certain set of indicators, but to increase choices (and thereby 'freedoms'). It is evident from the study that about 84.3% of males and 93.4% of females agreed about equality of social opportunities between male and female. A closer look into the variables of social institutions indicates that the difference between male and female opinions lies mainly on assigning same duties/responsibilities, on the distributing ownership of property/assets rights and on the same freedom to women. We observe that males are more conservative than females. However, it is argued here that the gender gap in the ownership and control of property is the single most critical contributor to the gender gap in economic well being, social status and empowerment (Agarwal, 1993).

The level of abilities includes two components 'Both can perform all tasks equally well' and 'Both have similar intelligence and abilities'. Overall, males have the opinions that females are psychologically inferior and fifty percent of females respondents it. Clearly, the above participants attributed lack of confidence and low self-esteem among women as one of the factors that contribute to the persistent under-representation of women in the educational fields and other unequal spheres in our society also. This is to be noted that some of these female respondents are university toppers in subjects like Physics or mathematics. These responses raise our concern about how deeply gender stereotyping has ingrained into the young minds, even being the most efficient performer at the tertiary level of education. The authors believe that this is the most significant part of this work. Female post-graduates generally reported a lower "self-concept" regarding their

abilities and male opinions are more conservative than female ones. These results suggest that access to human capital is more difficult for women in societies where they are considered "inferior". However, women are not inferior to men in their intellectual and physical capacities (Kemal, 1867, quoted in Morrision & Jutting, 2005). Moreover, psychological research on male and female abilities in mathematics and science shows that there are no differences in overall aptitude for these subjects (Spelke, 2005). "Girls are not only tended to attain higher scores than boys, they were also more aware of strategies for understanding, remembering and summarizing information (PISA, 2009; The Hindu, 16 January 2012).

Often there are fundamental inequalities in gender relations within the family or the household. This can take many different forms. Even in cases where there are no overt signs of gender biases, family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of the sharing the burden of housework and childcare (Sen, 2001). It is quite common in many societies to take for granted that men will naturally work outside the home, while women could do so if and only if they could combine such work with various inescapable and unequally shared household duties (Benin & Edwards, 1990; Brannen, 1995; Gill, 1998; McHale et al., 1990; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981; Sen, 2001). This is sometimes called "division of labor", though it often appears as "accumulation of labor" (Sen, 2001). The reach of this inequality includes not only unequal relations within the family, but also derivative inequalities in employment and recognition in the outside world. The – often unequal – division of work among adults in the household is central to the construction of gender within the family (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). If housework is also perceived of as a gendered activity among children, the likelihood is great that an unequal division of work will be reproduced among them (Evertsson, 2006). Segregation is conceptualized and measured as the difference in two groups' percentage distributions across some set of categories (Reskin & Bielby, 2005). The beliefs of post-graduate students towards gender equality in sharing housework are presented in this study. This study indicates that both male and female students endorse housework (outside) for males and housework (inside) for females, but male respondents exhibit more stringent gender stereotyping than females.

This study also reveals a sharp contrast between male and female perceptions about the traits and attributes of human being needed for quality of life where human dignity is respected. Both male and female respondents think that ‘shy’, ‘passive’, ‘soft’ under ‘submissiveness’ domain is essentially feminine. The popular belief about role stereotyping in male and females expects a woman to be less intelligent, less assertive and so on. This hegemony often leads the women students to believe that they are the lesser able members in the society and also chose ‘softer disciplines’ of study and to play lesser productive financially.

Women’s access to higher education is very much dependent on their earlier access to education and also, their earlier performance. Performance is influenced by one’s perceived competence, by positive expectancies, by one’s own strength, and efficacy, and by self-esteem (Bandura, 1986; Benassi, 2001). Negative gender stereotyping endorsement have an impact on students’ self-concept—which in turn influences their academic career choices. Low self-esteem among female students is determined by a variety of historical, social, and cultural factors (e.g., Frank, 2004; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000) which again determine gender stereotyping.

In addition, this study gives an idea in which direction the wind of change is blowing as regards the advancement of higher education for women in West Bengal. Education in general and higher education in particular, is expected to uphold the dignity of women as equal partners in societal development. The principle of equality in a highly stratified society like India rests on changes in the value and normative structure, and the educational system has a pivotal role to play in creating awareness among the more and the less equals of our society in terms of their rights, privileges and duties towards others (Bhat, 1999). Here we observed that the higher education system is not sufficient for developing the right attitude and independent and creative thinking among post-graduate students.

It is also a criticism to the Gender Inequality Index (GII), introduced as another experimental measure in 2010which includes aggregate data on educational attainment, economic and political participation, and female –specific health issues. The Gender

Inequality Index has been designed to overcome the most important limitations of the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) introduced in 1995. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is developed by combining the analysis of well being with that of empowerment. One of the indicators chosen for empowerment in GII is educational attainment (Secondary level and above). Education is an essential factor that contributes to the creation of knowledge and self-confidence. Education brings empowerment because it strengthens people's capacity to question and act on one's condition and increases accessibility to the information needed to do so. But, in this study, we observe that self-confidence, in other words empowerment, is not developed even in the case of post-graduate students. This is the most significant part of this research work.

On the whole, Women, SC and ST seem to have been the beneficiaries of the educational expansion in India, though it is difficult to come to this conclusion without separate gender based enrolment data or public and private institutions and for each and every discipline and academic programme separately for all social groups. Because since 1991 the ideology of the Indian State's New Economic Policy emphasizes the pre-eminence of markets and profits. In the context of an elite directed consensus on the inevitability of liberalisation and structural adjustment, the predominant problems and debates of education have undergone major shifts. The state is delegating its social commitments and responsibilities to private agencies and non-governmental organizations (Anandakrishnan, 2004). Most of the private institutes offer professional courses as these are popular and lucrative (Singh, 2008). Privatization has deepened the gender gap and social discrimination further.

5.3 Limitation of the study

This study took a first step in this direction, but needs to be supplemented by further research. One cannot rule out the possibility that our findings are specific to a particular University post-graduates.

5.4 Implications of the study

5.4.1 Educational implications

The present century is pushing human societies into a knowledge society. Countries, which have been able to provide education to a high proportion of their population (which includes both men and women) and engaged in higher education and research, have been in the forefront of development. Frontiers of knowledge are therefore bound to expand unimaginably and new research will oblige humanities, sciences, technologies and fine arts to arrive of new equations and new combinations.

Higher education is equally important for empowering women. The International Women's conference in 1985 at Nairobi defined women empowerment as a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. The parameters of education for women's empowerment range from enhancing self esteem and confidence of women, to building a positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, polity and economy. Women's study is a critical input to promote better understanding of women's contribution to social processes. The programmes of action for the women, aims to study and remove structural, cultural or attitudinal causes of gender discrimination and this will empower women to achieve effective participation in all areas of national and international development.

There are three key reasons why gender analysis is relevant to all aspects of economic and the social development and more specifically to the core Millienium Development goals (MDG) of halving world poverty by 2015(Kabeer, 2003).

The first reason is that, while gender inequality is not the only, or even the most marked form of inequality in a society, it is the most pervasive. It is a feature of social relations in all societies, although it manifests itself variously in different places. Understanding the causes and consequences of gender inequality, and therefore, the power relations that generates and is generated in the process, should be of concern to all societies in the world, rich as well as poor.

The second reason is that the pervasiveness of gender inequality cuts across all other forms of socio-economic differentiation. It is a feature of rich as well as poor groups, racially dominant as well as racially subordinates privileged as well as ‘untouchable’ castes. The intersection of gender discrimination with economic deprivation tends to produce intensified forms of disadvantage, more often for women and girls than for men and boys. For this reason, a gender analysis of education would examine the problem in terms of the unequal relationships between women and men, girls and boys, but tends to focus on dealing with the greater disadvantage of women and girls.

The third and final reason is that gender relations influence and structure the relations of production and reproduction within every known society. As Gita Sen puts it:

A gender perspective means recognising that women stand at the crossroads between production and reproduction, between economic activity and the care of human beings, and therefore between economic growth and human development. They are workers in both spheres - those most responsible and therefore with most at stake, those who suffer most when the two spheres meet at cross-purposes, and those most sensitive to the need for better integration between the two (Sen 1995:12).

It is this positioning of women at the intersection of productive and reproductive activities that gives rise to potential synergies and trade-offs which policymakers need to be aware of in their attempts to achieve the MDGS. It also means that the MDGs, each of which relate to a particular form of deprivation or shortfall, cannot be achieved in isolation from the structural inequalities which gave rise to them. If gender inequality is part and parcel of the processes of poverty and discrimination in a society, it must figure just as integrally in the set of measures to eradicate these conditions.

So, it is said that

“There is now a shared understanding within the development community that development policies and actions that fail to take gender inequality into account and fail to address disparities between males and females will have limited effectiveness and serious cost implications.” World Bank (2003a), p. 4

5.4.2 Implications for policy and planning

The findings suggest several implications for policy development. These are:

- The policy implications of the current situation suggests the imperative of creating a broad-based database on higher education which is gender sensitive as well as jobs prospective across social groups and a broad study encompassing the social, cultural and economic conditions of the SC and ST along with their proximity and exposure to the mainstream culture with a better understanding of the heterogeneity among gender and caste.
- It is evident that very large differences in educational attainment and access continue to exist and therefore must be addressed through public action. Such action must necessarily include reservations, but there have to be other strategies *in addition*, to ensure wider and more democratic access. These can include more public provision of higher educational institutions in backward areas and for deprived groups, more scholarships and other incentives for deprived categories, etc.
- The data provided here have shown that the social reality of discrimination and marginalization in higher education is a more complex mosaic than is often presented. Such complexity needs to be noted and addressed when designing public policies. In particular, gender gaps which cut across social categories that are evident from these data need to be addressed.
- It is also evident that higher education generates very different prospects of employment across social categories, and therefore strategies of affirmative action also have to incorporate actions designed to affect the labour market.
- For fulfilling the quota or more number of SC and ST students at higher levels of education, both the public as well as the private initiatives are necessary for raising the level of academic attainment at the lower levels of education which is a prerequisite criterion for entry to higher levels.

- Last but not the least, a consorted and coordinated action in different areas, including *gender sensitization* of males and females at all levels of society, reform of education systems and material and new legislation concerning the media is therefore highly necessary. This requires a reformation of the whole society. Changes in many different levels and the cooperation of all concerned actors will support such a change, but *women's own will* power at the highest level is central to this change.

5.5 Scope for further research:

On the basis of the present research work the following topics are suggested for further research in this area.

1. Is Vidyasagar University unique in the way students are bunched in some disciplines? It would be helpful to situate the specific case to the wider environments, even if through secondary sources. Research may be conducted on women's access to Higher Education from other Universities in West Bengal or about the higher education in West Bengal in general.
2. The present study can be replicated with samples from different professional institutes and Universities.
3. The present researcher attempts to look at gender stereotypes that remain present within the Indian society around this university of survived students. There is a need to conduct studies in other Universities in West Bengal or in India.