

Exploring the Gender Participation in Higher Education: Study of a Distance Education Centre

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ABSTRACT---Now, consider or not to ignore the 49% of our population has become the popular saying of the day. That 49% population has been constituted by women. Historically they have been deprived from many of their basic rights, denied from many basic things and from participating in various social processes. Social advancements brought many changes at various levels regarding women. Women stood for equality, participation and for empowerment. But it all became possible, along with other factors, through education. In the said context an attempt has been made to explore the female participation in higher education. A university, which has been given a unique mandate by the Parliament itself to educate women, has been chosen to study. Data has been taken from the statistical cell of the university, and classified course, stream, year and level wise. All the classified data have been presented in tabular form. It is found that their participation is near to equal and even more than their male counterpart in some courses. The study also reveals that their participation also varies from course to course.

The women cause has travelled through equality, participation and finally empowerment. Equality was demanded with the feeling that women were discriminated against at various levels, may be at family, society etc. The question of participation was brought forth with the realization that merely protection against discrimination is not enough for women to realize their potentials, rather they must be given chance to participate in the social processes so they can experience the world and can realize the potentials that they have as men. Enthusiasm for participation was also driven by the fact that somewhere it was sensed that participation will automatically bring equality whereas satisfaction only on equality will put the women again at receiving end forever. Further it is realized that the key of participation lies with the empowerment. It is the legitimate power that gives provision to participate in the processes. Then the question that why not women should be given opportunity to operate the key of power, led to the demand for empowerment of women. These demands have not been achieved at its full length due to several factors. The common cause that was collectively associated with these demands and issues is education of women. Education is considered the means of all.

According to the 2001 Census of India, the total literacy rate is 65.38 and with the classification of gender it is 75.85% among males and 54.16% among females. This gap between male and female at the literacy level may be used as a hint to imagine the wide gap at the level of secondary and higher education, because of the high female ratio among drop outs at various levels. This is the common story of the country. The situation of Muslim women is worse than the common. In the light of the Sachhar committee revelations it can be assumed that the share of Muslim women in the 54.16% female literacy in India must be very skimpy.

In this milieu it is thought to explore the female participation in higher education. For this purpose a university which was established with the mandate to promote women education was considered suitable to study. Maulana Azad National Urdu University was established to impart education through Urdu medium and to promote female education. At the same time here is another cause to justify the study of this university that is, the university does not have the religious minority character in its act but by keeping Urdu linguistic character it attracts the students, majority of them are hailing from Muslim religious minority. Another important reason that again makes the University germane to be studied in the given context is the social background of its students. Most of the students are from first generation learners, they are from disadvantageous backgrounds, and they have found the Urdu medium in general and Distance mode Urdu medium in particular as a gateway to continue their studies. With these facts it is safe to assume that the study will be able to reveal the facts about a stratum which comprises upon the major portion of Indian population and which is aware about the importance of education and struggling for it. Here it seems correct to say about the group that it was aware about and struggling for the education because without awareness and willingness no such huge registration was possible that MANUU had enjoyed in a very short time. Knowing the female participation of such groups, in comparison of their males, in all walks of life in general and in education in particular may be helpful to understand the real state of equality, participation and possibilities of empowerment.

Maulana Azad National Urdu University has been established in 1998 by an act of Parliament at Hyderabad. The act empowers the university to offer programmes in both distance and regular mode. Taking the benefit of distance education, which is comparatively easy to start as it requires less staff and infrastructure as compared to conventional education, University has started its distance wing from 1998 itself by entering into MoUs with other universities. Now the university is equally active in regular mode of education also but the enrolment in distance mode is still much higher than the regular one. In this paper we will concentrate on distance mode of education and will try to understand the trend by looking into the data available with the Directorate of Distance Education about its students.

University started Distance education programmes in 1998 with the introduction of plane graduate programmes such as B.A, B.Sc. and B.Com. Subsequently Post Graduate courses were included in 2004-2005. Presently the Directorate offers the Courses as below:

1. M.A. programmes in (i) Urdu; (ii) History; (iii) English
2. Bachelor of Arts; (B.A.)
3. Bachelor of Science; (B.Sc)
4. Bachelor of Commerce;(B.Com)
5. Bachelor of Education; (B.Ed)
6. Diploma in Teach English
7. Diploma in Primary Education
8. Diploma in Journalism and mass Communication
9. Certificate in Food and Nutrition
10. Certificate in Proficiency in Urdu through English
11. Certificate in Proficiency in Urdu through Hindi
12. Certificate in Functional English for Urdu speakers

Here we will have a look into the data year wise overall and latter course wise so the female participation in various courses of the university may be assessed.

Table 1: Year wise Student’s enrolment pattern since 1998 till 2010 with gender classification.

Academic Year	Total Students Enrolment	Men Enrolment	% to total Enrolment	Women Enrolment	% to total Enrolment
1998-1999	2551	1337	52.41	1214	47.59
1999-2000	3853	1797	46.64	2056	53.36
2000-2001	4438	2158	48.63	2280	51.37
2001-2002	4373	2087	47.72	2286	52.28
2002-2003	6675	3374	50.55	3301	49.45
2003-2004	7205	3948	54.80	3257	45.20
2004-2005	8778	4582	52.20	4196	47.80
2005-2006	13897	7296	52.50	6601	47.50
2006-2007	14682	7904	53.83	6778	46.17
2007-2008	15379	8713	56.66	6666	43.34
2008-2009	22388	12736	56.89	9652	43.11
2009-2010	19309	10340	53.55	8969	46.45
Total	123528	66272	53.65	57256	46.35

The above table shows year wise total enrolment of the University with gender classification from 1998 to 2010. As per the overall data the symptoms are positive. In the first year of its opening female registration have been made 47.59% while in subsequent three academic years that is from 1999 to 2002 the female registration took over the men with 53.36%, 51.37% and 52.28% respectively. In the next year that is in 2002-3 the ratio was almost equal with a minor difference of .5%. Least registration of the female was recorded in the year 2007-8 and 2008-9 that is 43.34% and 43.11% respectively. The overall female ratio among the registered students of the Directorate is 46.35% which is of course lower than the male counterpart but with a positive and satisfactory trend.

Programme wise data shows a different rather interesting trend of female registration. As said above we will have a look into the data programme wise.

1. CERTIFICATE PROGRAMMES

The certificate courses were introduced in 1999. A Certificate course in Food and Nutrition, Certificate in Proficiency in Urdu through English and Certificate in Proficiency in Urdu through Hindi is now on offer.

Table 2: Students Enrolment in Certificate Programmes with gender classification

Academic Year	Total Students Enrolment	Men Enrolment	% to total Enrolment	Women Enrolment	% to total Enrolment
1999-2000	124	58	46.77	66	53.23
2000-2001	242	179	73.97	63	26.03
2001-2002	230	147	63.91	83	36.09
2002-2003	683	367	53.73	316	46.27
2003-2004	771	523	67.83	248	32.17
2004-2005	514	293	57.00	221	43.00
2005-2006	317	194	61.20	123	38.80
2006-2007	192	115	59.90	77	40.10
2007-2008	253	153	60.47	100	39.53
2008-2009	314	192	61.15	122	38.85
2009-2010	161	92	57.14	69	42.86
Total	3801	2313	60.85	1488	39.15

The data shows a big gap in both the genders except in some academic years. There is only one session that recorded the female enrolment higher than male that is 1999-2000. In this year females were registered 53.23% in comparison of their male counterpart which is 46.77%. In the very next academic year the ratio of female participation fell at the highest gap ever recorded from 1999 to 2010. This was 26.03% while male registration was 73.97%. In all other remaining academic sessions the recorded gap between genders is considerable. It is not negligible as evident in the table. The overall ratio of female and male in certificate courses from 1999 to 2010 is 39.15% of female and 60.85% for male which is very much diverse from the overall ratio recorded in the previous table.

2. DIPLOMA PROGRAMMES

Diploma in teach English has been introduced as the first course of Directorate in the Diploma Category in 2004. Subsequently in 2005 Diploma in Primary Education was introduced and in 2006 Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication was started. Data about the enrolment of students has been taken from the Directorate and being presented in the below table with gender classification.

Table 3: Students Enrolment in Diploma Programmes

Academic Year	Total Students Enrolment	Men Enrolment	% to total Enrolment	Women Enrolment	% to total Enrolment
2004-2005	182	102	56.04	80	43.96
2005-2006	463	279	60.26	184	39.74
2006-2007	139	123	88.49	16	11.51

2007-2008	257	207	80.54	50	19.46
2008-2009	322	271	84.16	51	15.84
2009-2010	346	265	76.59	81	23.41
Total	1709	1247	72.97	462	27.03

Female enrolment in the diploma programme reached up to 43.96% in the first year of its introduction and which is the highest percentage ever recorded. In the very next year it slipped up to 39.74%. After that 11.51%, 19.46%, 15.84% and finally in 2010 23.41% female registration was recorded. The average %age of all the female registration constitutes 27.03% in comparison to 72.97% of males. Here another huge gap between the registrations of both the genders is recorded.

3. DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Degree programmes of the Directorate include B.A, B.Sc. and B.Com. These courses were introduced from the very beginning of the university that is from 1998. Along with these Bachelor of Education was also introduced in 2004 but this programme was restricted only to in service teachers.

Table 4: Students Enrolment in Degree Programmes

Academic Year	Total Students Enrolment	Men Enrolment	% to total Enrolment	Women Enrolment	% to total Enrolment
1998-1999	2551	1337	52.41	1214	47.59
1999-2000	3729	1739	46.63	1990	53.37
2000-2001	4196	1979	47.16	2217	52.84
2001-2002	4143	1940	46.83	2203	53.17
2002-2003	5992	3007	50.18	2985	49.82
2003-2004	6434	3425	53.23	3009	46.77
2004-2005	7049	3571	50.66	3478	49.34
2005-2006	10333	5298	51.27	5035	48.73
2006-2007	9896	4971	50.23	4925	49.77
2007-2008	11123	6075	54.62	5048	45.38
2008-2009	15177	8482	55.89	6695	44.11
2009-2010	13593	7104	52.26	6489	47.74
Total	94216	48928	51.93	45288	48.07

The trend of female registration is entirely different in degree programmes from others. In the very first year of its introduction the female ratio was recorded 47.59%. In the next following three years the female ratio superseded the male with about 7, 5, and 7%. In the year 2002-3 the ratio went down but in negligible manner that was .18%. The same trend of slight difference was also recorded in other two academic years of 2004-5 and 2006-7 as shown in the table. The 11% is the maximum disparity recorded in the year of 2008-9. Overall ratio of the graduate enrolment has the disparity of even less than 2% which is again negligible.

4. POST-GRADUATE PROGRAMMES

The Directorate presently has three post-graduate programmes on offer. Programme includes M.A in Urdu, History and English who were started in 2004, 2005 and 2006 respectively.

Table 5: Students Enrolment in Postgraduate Programmes

Academic Year	Total Students Enrolment	Men Enrolment	% to total Enrolment	Women Enrolment	% to total Enrolment
2004-2005	1033	616	59.63	417	40.37
2005-2006	2784	1525	54.78	1259	45.22
2006-2007	4455	2695	60.49	1760	39.51
2007-2008	3746	2278	60.81	1468	39.19
2008-2009	6575	3791	57.66	2784	42.34
2009-2010	5209	2879	55.27	2330	44.73
Total	23802	13784	57.91	10018	42.09

Female enrolment in post graduate programmes of the Directorate has shown a different trend from all other courses. Its female participation started in the 2004-5 with 40.37% and reached up to 44.73% in 2009-10. It shows a continuous growth with little fluctuation. The gender gap that was recorded at initial was 19.26% reduced up to 10.54% in 2009-10. The overall %age (42.09) which is of course lesser than the %age recorded in the table showing graduate data, but having a positive trend.

Biggest female registration in graduate programmes and a continuous and almost steady growth in post graduation shows that the opening of Maulana Azad National Urdu University and particularly its Distance Education has brought a doorway to Muslim girls continue their higher education. Superseding female registration which is higher than the national average, also hints that there were some hindrances not allowing females to go for their education that this University has removed. Low participation in certificate and diploma programmes may be because of the course nature. They are not very much preferred courses among females, even though their participation is considerable.

It seems that a University is meeting its responsibilities entrusted by the Government. The University has got success in catering the educational need of the people for them it is made. For furthering its growth the university should launch some other such courses that can be the point of attraction for females.

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