



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE PROSPECTS OF FEMININE LEADERSHIP IN THE ACADEMIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The concept of leadership, at all levels, encompasses many facets: vision, the capacity to inspire as well as to organize, to handle power, to assume responsibility and, perhaps, most importantly, to serve society at large in some particular way. In a world of increasing complexity (some would say chaos), the quality of leadership has certainly assumed new proportions which are essential to the survival and success of any enterprise or institution. This brings us to the notion of feminine leadership and a number of related issues notably whether this is a valid concept and whether women will be permitted to claim their right to participation in higher education decision-making at all levels and on their own terms. In a study commissioned by UNESCO to the Inter-American Association for Higher Education, Professor Sheryl Bond of Queen's University, Canada, examined the concept of academic leadership today, emphasizing that the increasing appointment of women indicates the reality of social change. Factors preventing women's access to top positions are considered and new paradigms witnessing the interaction of social context and positional power are described. Bond advocates a move from debate to dialogue which will equate the advancement of women with the renewal and progress of the institution - an essential shift in thinking if higher education is to contribute effectively to the development process.

KEYWORDS : Feminine Leadership – Challenges – Prospects – Remedial Studies – International arena.

Women's higher education helps in moving the family and society in higher strata and developed the nation in better ways. Education enables women to acquire basic skills and abilities and foster a value system which is conducive to raise their status in society. They also represent valuable human resources and play an important role in the development of the community and national economy. Educated women can easily understand and adjust to the environment from time to time accordingly.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For the national development, human development is very important irrespective of gender. India is among the few developing countries where gender equality and improvement in the status of women are specifically stated to be central goals of development and social policy. Education is the key that can empower women. Education undoubtedly contributes to the development. It is universally accepted that female literacy rates have a positive impact on health, and other social issues. It raises income, improves health and increases productivity. Education helps women to gain access to knowledge, skills, jobs and participation in society. According to Seth (2001), "the productive and creative energies of the Women of India have to be released through creative and sound education to which they must have access at all cost. This would be the key to their empowerment". The programme of Action (1992) also states that the National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators with active involvement of educational institutions.

Since 1951 there has been a steady growth in universities/university level institutions and colleges in India. The growth of student enrolment and percentage of women in Higher Education is shown in table 1. While over the years there is a steady rise in the proportion of women entering university, the wide gap between women and men entering university still persists (Table 1).

Table 1. Decadal growth in women's enrolment at Higher Education level

Year	Total Enrolment	% age of women
1960-70	3,96,745	10.9
1971-80	10,49,864	16.2
1981-90	19,53,700	22.0
1991-00	27,52,437	27.2
2001-10	49,24,868	29.2
2011-14	83,99,443	39.4

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2004-05, MHRD. New Delhi 2007

If we further see the enrolment of women in different field of education, it is seen from the table below that the highest representation of women is in 'Education'. During 2011-14 more than 50% students in the field of education were women which indicated that women are more inclined towards teaching profession. This is followed by disciplines like Arts and Medicine. In 2000-01, 44% of Medical admissions were of women. Contrary to these fields, very few women seem to opt for fields like Engineering, Agriculture and Veterinary Science. Over the five-year period, (1995-96 to 2000-01) overall preference of students for different subjects has not shown much change (Table 2, values in parenthesis). Slight reduction in preference for Arts and increase in preference for Science and Engineering followed by Commerce seems to be there.

At the moment, feminine leadership and its possible benefits continue to constitute a controversial area of the debate in terms of empowerment for women. However, there is a growing belief that feminine leadership is emerging as a distinct force in management which has been influenced by very specific factors:

- A commitment to power sharing (which implies rejection of power by domination)
- An insistence on self-respect, service and the importance of merit
- A focus on concrete results in the professional context
- Recognition and accommodation of the pressures of managing personal and professional lives.

As we continue in transition mode, a significant group would still deny these trends, insisting that access to decision-making still depends essentially on emulation of male behaviour. However, despite this divergence of opinion, all would agree that truly able women leaders have an obligation to assist other competent women.

Cultural Diversity, Women and Higher Education

Without doubt, the reality of cultural diversity is a most problematic area in relation to women as leaders and managers both in higher education and in society at large. Many factors come into play - the historical roles of women in certain societies, the conflicts arising from their advanced education and exposure to other cultures, their own continued commitment to the values of their own race, religion and nation.

In dealing with the tension between women of varied cultures and their role in the advancement of higher education, several points must be kept in mind:

- The role of women in any given society is subject to a number of key traditions, some of which are age-old and must impact on their lives as citizens and professions in particularly complex ways; the

Special Project Women, Higher Education and Development, by promoting the training and research modalities of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme, aims to improve the careers of women in priority areas such as higher education management, community health, social inclusion, poverty alleviation and science and development. These Chairs and networks recognize cultural identity as a key variable in structuring the activities implemented;

- In certain countries and cultures, highly women have had access to power but often because of their family, marital or political connections;
- Management varies enormously amongst cultures - a fact which has gained even greater attention with the reality of internationalization; an understanding of other peoples and of their languages as an expression of their thought patterns is now accepted as an essential component for successful enterprise in every sphere of activity;
- Paradoxically, management is - universally - about getting things done by other people. Hence, at some point, it is essential for cultures to find common ground for dialogue and negotiation. In this context, culture ceases to be a barrier and, instead, becomes a bridge to building links with the other side.

In the leadership and management of higher education, women of different cultures can network to exchange visions and views which enrich their own approaches to specific issues, including the way in which they handle male attitudes to power and decision-making in their own countries. Despite profound cultural diversity, certain precepts must guide women as they seek greater participation in decision-making and power sharing:

- Women's Legal Rights
- The Critical Mass Factor
- Adapting Cultural Traditions
- The Challenges of Leadership
- Institutional Commitment to Gender Equity
- Feminine Leadership
- The Social Responsibilities of Higher Education

These are universally valid and attest, in the most eloquent manner possible, to the feminine vision of priorities for higher education leadership in the coming years when a new social partnership will be increasing sought - not only by women but by all responsible citizens.

Conclusions: Trends towards Change

What are the perspectives with regard to these issues?

The world is moving towards greater democracy and market-oriented policies in an effort to improve human development. In this climate, more opportunities should be provided for women to obtain executive appointments. The efforts of specialized agencies, of women's groups and the resolutions of international conferences all contribute towards the recruitment of women for such positions.

Clear trends to strengthen the empowerment of highly qualified women are visible in the fields of research, training, advocacy and networking and must be further strengthened. These operate both in the higher education domain itself and also in professional activities. The spin-off effects resulting from increased access and participation are life-long and have flow-on benefits for women in all social groups.

These thus constitute the foundations of UNESCO's Global Strategy for Women, Higher Education and Development mentioned earlier and which aims at their enhanced participation in the decision-making process.

In conclusion, what is now required is a common vision of social and human development shared by men and women alike. This vision is based on social justice and accords women their rightful place in decision-making:

"The essential task of the 21st century may well be to forge a new partnership between men and women in dealing with the present and in shaping the future of our personal and public agendas."

According to this vision, all leaders - whether male or female - become key agents of change for the creation of a new society. Therefore, they are no longer adversaries but full and equal partners in this important endeavour.

The World Conference on Higher Education must clearly articulate the profound desire of women to forge this new social partnership.

Strategies for Future Action

To promote advocacy concerning the access of women to higher education and their participation in this sector:

- 1) **UNESCO** should establish an international observatory on women and Higher Education to monitor their access, participation, and presence in decision-making
- 2) **International NGOs** should undertake a critical review of legal instruments to ascertain effectiveness with regard to higher education
- 3) **NGOs**, specialized or interested in women and higher education, should pursue training to perfect their advocacy skills in the field of gender at international, regional, national and institutional levels
- 4) **Via NGOs** specialized in higher education (e.g. regional rectors' associations and conferences), a Charter of Commitment to Gender Equality should be drawn up for signature by institutional leaders
- 5) **UNESCO** should support initiatives to evaluate and follow-up the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995). These may include symposia and regional activities and a special meeting should be convened in 2000.

To promote the presence of women at the decision-making levels of higher education and their employment as graduates

- 6) **Institutions** should set up a senior committee to ensure that goals concerning gender equality are attained.
- 7) **Equal Employment Opportunity** Offices should be established in universities and higher education institutions to monitor the progress of women academics and administrators (e.g. appointment to chairs, HOD posts, senior management posts etc.)
- 8) **Career orientation offices** and graduate placement services should adopt special measures to ensure that women students are fully informed of opportunities and obstacles with regard to gender in different professions
- 9) **Higher education institutions** and NGOs (notably those representing women and students) should make optimal use of role models and pathfinders as a means to inform and advise women students concerning their career choices. Special attention should be given to fields where women are underrepresented (e.g. sciences, engineering)

To promote action research and training

- 10) The number of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN networks which promote the gender dimension in areas of higher education should be increased.
- 11) UNESCO and other agencies to set up mobile teams of gender experts able to encourage endogenous capacity building at national and institutional levels.
- 12) In certain contexts and instances, quota systems may be considered desirable as a means of moving towards full gender equality.
- 13) A Code of Good Practice in each region should be elaborated to illustrate the promotion of gender equality across different cultural contexts.
- 14) NGOs specialized in higher education and women should run extensive training sessions for students and recent graduates, both men and women, on feminine leadership with a view to creating a more human society.
- 15) The principle of Lifelong Learning for women should be strongly supported and appropriate measures adopted to to permit them to continue their studies, to re-enter the workforce and to harmonize their professional and personal responsibilities.

Goals for 2020

1. By 2020, a country's enrolments in higher education (i.e. both post-secondary education for the 18-24 year old age groups and mature students) should reflect targeted maintenance or increase in the number of women enrolled: e.g. maintenance of 50% or more in countries where this is the case; a target of 20-30% increase in countries where the enrolment of women is low.
2. University chairs, professorships and head of department posts should be filled by men and women on an equal basis. As many women now hold the required qualifications, targets to regularly increase their appointments until the 50% figure is reached should

- be established. This may involve the creation of new posts.
3. Ideally, 50% of all rectors/vice-chancellors should be women. In reality, statistics show that, on average, only 5-7% of rector/VC posts are occupied by women. Institutions should set a policy to increase this figure by 25% per year till 50% is reached. A policy of alternation may be useful in this instance.
 4. 50% of the members of higher education governing bodies (e.g. university senates, national councils etc) should be women. Targets to increase their presence on a regular basis till the 50% is reached should be set.
 5. In certain cultural contexts, stronger efforts are required to avoid the exclusion of women from acceding to and participating in higher education. Such exclusion denies women the right to contribute to sustainable social and human development.

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