



## Understanding the Present Scenario of Women in Higher Education of Purba & Paschim Medinipur District

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**ABSTRACT:** The global discourse on women's participation in higher education has gained momentum, signifying a shift towards greater gender inclusivity in educational institutions. Even with significant advancements, there are still gaps in access to and involvement in higher education, especially in areas with socioeconomic difficulties like the Indian districts of Purba and Paschim Medinipur. In this sense, the importance of higher education in influencing socioeconomic growth and empowering individuals is crucial. But a variety of obstacles, like as societal and cultural norms and institutional impediments, prevent women in these regions from pursuing higher education. It is important to comprehend the current state of women's involvement in higher education in the Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts in order to pinpoint gaps and develop focused solutions. Through an analysis of women's college establishment trends and enrolment patterns at different levels, this study seeks to understand the current state of women's involvement in higher education in these districts. The study indicates that despite progress, there are still gender differences in literacy and educational attainment, which adds to the reliance and oppression of women. Comprehensive approaches, such as institutional initiatives, community-based activities, and legislative interventions, are required to address these difficulties. Affirmative action guidelines, grants, gender awareness campaigns, mentorship programmes, and community service projects are among the suggestions. Policymakers, educational institutions, and communities can create inclusive and equitable higher education systems by putting these methods into practice. This will help women reach their full potential and make valuable contributions to society.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender Equity, Higher Education, Socio-economic Factors, Women Education.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in higher education has been a topic of growing significance globally, reflecting a shift towards greater gender inclusivity in educational institutions. Historically, access to higher education has been limited for women due to entrenched socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and systemic barriers (Ghara, 2016). However, concerted efforts towards gender equality and women's empowerment have led to notable advancements in recent decades. Despite progress, persistent disparities in women's access to and participation in higher education continue to exist, particularly in regions with socio-economic challenges such as Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts in India (Jana, 2017).. In the context of India, higher education plays a pivotal role in shaping socio-economic development, fostering critical thinking skills, and empowering individuals to contribute meaningfully to society (Banerjee, 2021). Yet, women in many parts of the country, including Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts, face multifaceted challenges that hinder their pursuit of higher education.

Understanding the present scenario of women's participation in higher education in Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts is of paramount importance for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into the extent of gender disparities and the specific challenges faced by women in accessing and completing higher education programs. Secondly, it sheds light on the socio-economic factors influencing women's educational attainment, including poverty, lack of familial support, and limited opportunities for employment and upward mobility. Thirdly, studying the present scenario enables policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to identify gaps in existing initiatives and formulate targeted interventions to promote gender equity in higher education. Moreover, examining the status of women in higher education within the context of Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts offers a localized perspective that accounts for unique socio-cultural dynamics and regional disparities. These districts, situated in the state of West Bengal, encompass diverse communities, including tribal populations and marginalized groups, which may face distinct challenges



in accessing educational opportunities (Mal & Tripathy, 2013). By focusing on this specific geographical area, this study aims to provide nuanced insights into the intersecting factors shaping women's educational experiences and opportunities.

The present study seeks to explore the current landscape of women's participation in higher education in Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts, with a view to addressing the underlying barriers and promoting gender equity in educational attainment. By examining the background and context of women's participation in higher education and highlighting its significance within this specific regional context, this research endeavours to contribute to broader efforts aimed at fostering inclusive and equitable educational systems.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the chronological establishment of girls' colleges in both Purba and Paschim Medinipur.
- To critically analyse the current situation of women in Purba and Paschim Medinipur.
- To highlight the annual enrolment of women in higher education relative to the overall enrolment in Purba and Paschim Medinipur.
- To investigate the obstacles encountered by women in pursuing higher education.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive cum exploratory (Bowen, 2009). Secondary data forms the majority of its foundation. In order to conduct this study, data and information were gathered from both the administration and annual reports of Vidyasagar University. Several metrics, including the gross enrolment ratio, the number of universities, colleges, and so forth, have been used to conduct the analysis. Data interpretation has been done using descriptive statistical methods such as bar graphs.

### Population and sample:

The Purba and Paschim Medinipur district of west Bengal's population was taken into consideration by the researcher throughout his investigation. Therefore, the population under examination consisted of college and university students. Only undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students from various colleges and universities in the Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts make up the sample.

### Tools and Technique:

The effectiveness of any research hinges on the appropriateness of its tools, which significantly influences the validity of its findings. In this particular study, the researcher devised interview schedules for gathering data, ensuring their construction and validation by experts.

## 4. PRESENTATION OF DATA

### Socio-demographic Profile of Women in Higher Education:

Table No:-1 Year wise distribution of general degree colleges in Purba & Paschim Medinipur

Year	Total Colleges in Purba & Paschim Medinipur	Women Colleges in Purba & Paschim Medinipur	% of Women Colleges in Respect of Total College in Purba & Paschim Medinipur	Total Women Colleges in Purba & Paschim Medinipur
2013-14	43	02	4.65	02
2014-15	43	02	4.65	02
2015-16	54	04	7.40	04
2016-17	54	04	7.40	04
2017-18	56	04	7.14	04
2018-19	56	03	5.36	03
2019-20	56	03	5.36	03
2020-21	56	03	5.36	03
2021-22	56	03	5.36	03

Source: Annual Report of Vidyasagar University in West Bengal

Table No. 1 indicates that the largest number of women's colleges founded between 2015 and 2017 was 4. In terms of the overall number of colleges formed between 2015 and 2016, the highest percentage of women's colleges (7.40%) was founded. My research revealed that two women's colleges in Purba and Paschim Medinipur were founded prior to 2013. Then, in 2015–2016, two additional women's colleges were founded. 2018 saw the closure of one women's college. There are now 3 women's colleges in Purba and Paschim Medinipur.

**Distribution of women across different levels of education (undergraduate, postgraduate, research):**

**Table:-2 Year wise UG student enrolment in Higher education in Purba & Paschim Medinipur**

Year	Male students Enrolment	Female students Enrolment	Total enrolment	% of female students in respect of all Student
2021-22	20138	25316	45454	55.69
2020-21	19572	25315	44887	56.40
2019-20	17201	27711	44912	61.70
2018-19	20520	28847	49367	58.43
2017-18	10161	13166	23327	56.44

Source: Annual Report of Vidyasagar University in West Bengal

According to Table No. 2 of the Vidyasagar University report 2021–22, 45454 (provisional) students enrolled in a range of courses at all college levels. 25316 of the 45454 students have been female, bringing up 55.69 per cent of the total enrolled.

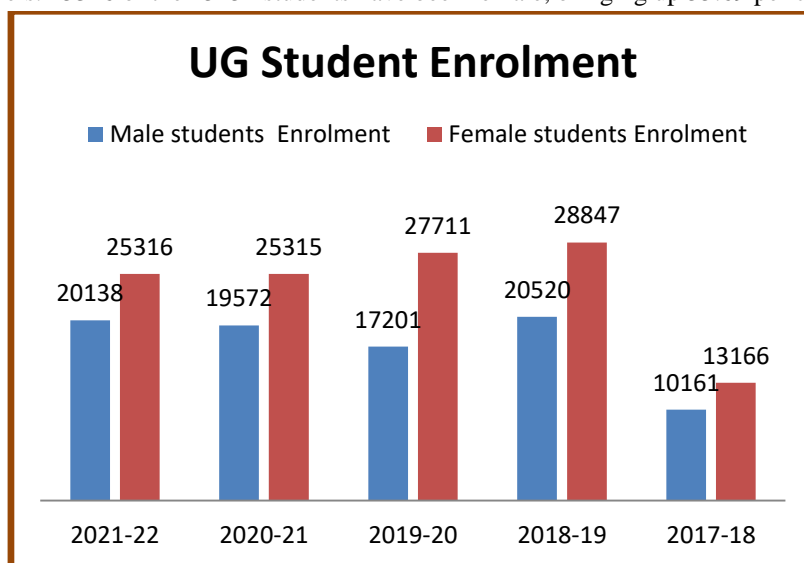


Fig.1 : - Year wise UG student enrolment

**Table No:-Year wise PG student enrolment in Higher education in Purba & Paschim Medinipur**

Year	Male students Enrolment	Female students Enrolment	Total enrolment	% of female students in respect of all Student
2021-22	1688	2244	3932	57.07
2020-21	1765	2083	3848	54.13
2019-20	2631	2772	5403	51.30
2018-19	1857	1634	3491	46.80
2017-18	1857	1595	3452	46.20
2016-17	1497	1845	3342	55.20

Source: Annual Report of Vidyasagar University in West Bengal



Based on Table No. 3 of the Vidyasagar University report 2021–22, 3932 (provisional) students enrolled in a variety of courses at all university levels. Women have made up 2244 of the 3932 enrolled students, or 57.07 per cent of the total. The number of women enrolling in higher education in Purba and Paschim Medinipur has increased steadily during the past four years.

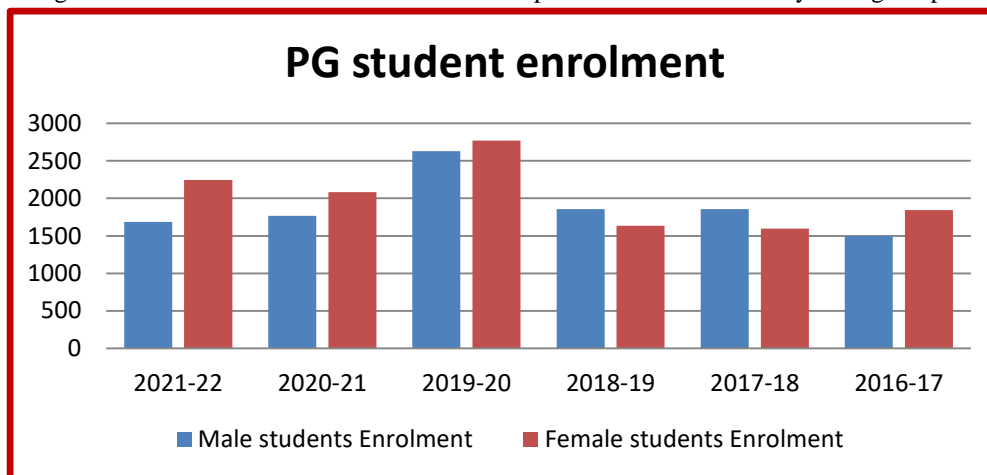


Fig.2:- Year wise PG student enrolment

Table No:-Year wise Ph.D. student enrolment in Higher education in Purba & Paschim Medinipur

Year	Male students Enrolment	Female students Enrolment	Total enrolment	% of female students in respect of all Student
2021-22	96	64	160	40.00
2020-21	77	37	114	32.46
2019-20	37	29	66	43.93
2018-19	88	46	134	34.33
2017-18	65	24	89	26.96
2016-17	64	34	98	34.70

Source: Annual Report of Vidyasagar University in West Bengal

As shown in Table No. 5 of the Vidyasagar University report 2021–2022, 106 (provisional) students registered in Ph.D. programmed at the university. Of the entire number enrolled, forty per cent (64 out of 106) are female students. The number of women enrolling in higher education in Purba and Paschim Medinipur increased steadily last year.

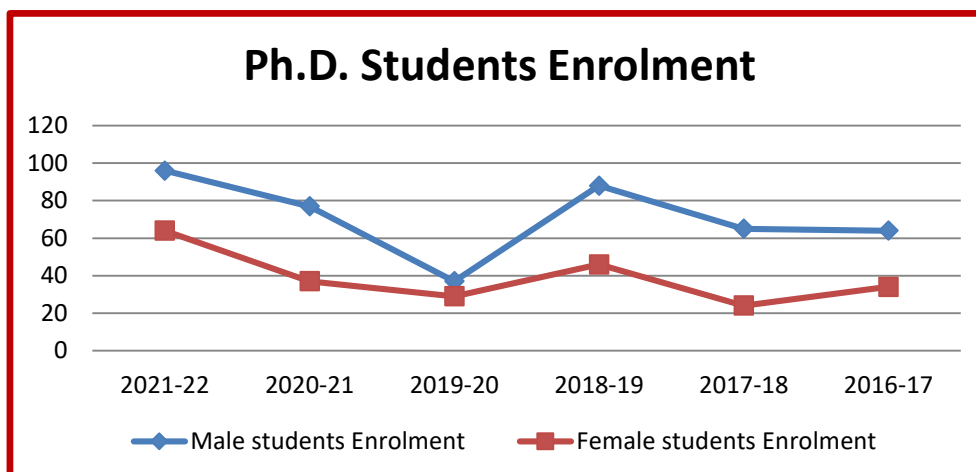


Fig.3:- Year wise Ph.D. students enrolment



## 5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The maximum number of women's colleges was established during the period of 2015-2017, totalling four (Maity, 2021). The highest proportion of women's colleges (7.40%) was established in the academic year 2015-2016, in relation to the total number of college establishments. Through my study, it was identified that in Purba & Paschim Medinipur, two women's colleges were established before 2013. Subsequently, two more women's colleges were established during the period of 2015-2016. However, after 2018, one women's college was closed, leaving a total of three women's colleges in Purba & Paschim Medinipur.

According to the Vidyasagar University report for 2021-2022, out of a provisional total of 45,454 students enrolled in various courses at all levels in colleges, 25,316 were women, constituting 55.69% of the total enrolment. Similarly, out of 3,932 students enrolled in various courses at all levels in the university, 2,244 were women, constituting 57.07% of the total enrolment. The past four years have seen continuous growth in women's enrolment for higher education in Purba & Paschim Medinipur.

The Vidyasagar University report for 2021-2022 also reveals that out of 160 students enrolled in Ph.D. courses in the university, 64 were women, constituting 40% of the total enrolment. The previous year also saw continuous growth in women's enrolment for higher education in Purba & Paschim Medinipur.

However, the study found that the female literacy rate still lags behind the male literacy rate, with only half of the female population being literate compared to three-fourths of the male population. Additionally, the rate of school dropouts is higher among girls. This disparity in literacy rates and education contributes to women's dependence on men and their subordinate roles. Lack of education is identified as the root cause of women's exploitation and subjugation (Ghara, 2016). Education is crucial in empowering women and enabling them to achieve their goals. Therefore, promoting education among women is essential for their empowerment and fulfilment.

## 6. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### Access barriers:

Access to higher education is often hindered by geographical distance, inadequate transportation infrastructure, and insufficient educational facilities. In rural areas, where many women reside, higher education institutions may be located far from their homes, making commuting difficult and costly (Panda, 2014). Moreover, poor road connectivity and lack of public transportation options exacerbate the challenge of accessing educational institutions, particularly for women from marginalized communities. Additionally, the lack of basic infrastructure such as libraries, laboratories, and computer facilities in remote areas further limits women's access to quality higher education.

### Socio-cultural constraints:

Gender roles, societal norms, and stereotypes continue to impede women's participation in higher education. In many societies, traditional gender expectations prioritize women's roles as caregivers and homemakers, relegating education to a secondary priority (Jana, 2017). Consequently, girls may face familial pressure to prioritize household duties over pursuing higher education, leading to early marriage or withdrawal from schooling. Moreover, deep-rooted stereotypes about women's intellectual capabilities and their suitability for certain fields of study perpetuate gender disparities in higher education enrolment and attainment. Discriminatory attitudes and gender biases within educational institutions can also create hostile environments that discourage women from pursuing academic pursuits.

### Economic factors:

Affordability and financial constraints pose significant barriers to women's participation in higher education. Many women come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, where limited financial resources make pursuing higher education financially burdensome (Nath, 2014). High tuition fees, along with additional expenses such as textbooks, accommodation, and study materials, may be prohibitively expensive for families struggling to make ends meet. Furthermore, the opportunity cost of foregoing employment to pursue higher education may outweigh the perceived benefits, particularly in contexts where women's earning potential is undervalued or limited by discriminatory labour practices (Panda, 2014). Additionally, the lack of employment opportunities for educated women, particularly in rural areas, diminishes the perceived value of investing in higher education, further exacerbating economic barriers to access.

Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted interventions that address structural, socio-cultural, and economic barriers to women's participation in higher education. Policy measures aimed at improving access to educational institutions,



enhancing transportation infrastructure, and expanding scholarship and financial aid programs can help mitigate access barriers (Sheikh, 2017). Moreover, efforts to challenge gender stereotypes, promote gender-sensitive educational environments, and engage communities in advocating for girls' education are essential for overcoming socio-cultural constraints. Additionally, initiatives aimed at improving women's economic empowerment, such as providing vocational training, creating job opportunities, and promoting entrepreneurship, can enhance the economic viability of pursuing higher education for women (Barajas & Owen, 2000). By addressing these challenges holistically, society can create more equitable and inclusive higher education systems that enable women to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

## 7. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

Promoting gender equity in higher education requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses policy interventions, institutional initiatives, and community-based efforts. By addressing systemic barriers and fostering inclusive environments, these strategies can help create equal opportunities for men and women to access and succeed in higher education.

### Policy recommendations:

**Affirmative action:** Implementing affirmative action policies can help address gender disparities in higher education by providing preferential treatment or quotas for underrepresented groups, including women. This can include reserved seats for women in educational institutions and recruitment policies that prioritize gender diversity.

**Scholarships and incentives:** Offering scholarships, grants, and financial incentives specifically targeted towards women can help alleviate financial barriers to higher education. These initiatives can include merit-based scholarships, need-based financial aid, and stipends for women from marginalized backgrounds.

### Institutional interventions:

**Gender sensitization programs:** Educational institutions can implement gender sensitization programs to raise awareness about gender issues, challenge stereotypes, and promote gender equality among students, faculty, and staff. These programs can include workshops, training sessions, and awareness campaigns focused on topics such as gender bias, sexual harassment prevention, and inclusive teaching practices.

**Mentorship programs:** Establishing mentorship programs can provide women with guidance, support, and role models to navigate the challenges of higher education. Pairing female students with faculty mentors or peer mentors can help foster academic and personal development, build confidence, and facilitate networking opportunities.

**Support services:** Offering comprehensive support services, such as counselling, childcare facilities, and academic advising tailored to the needs of women students, can help address their unique challenges and enhance their retention and success in higher education. Additionally, providing accommodations for pregnant and parenting students can ensure that women are not disadvantaged due to their caregiving responsibilities.

### Community-based initiatives:

**Awareness campaigns:** Engaging in community-based awareness campaigns can help challenge societal attitudes and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality in education. These campaigns can involve outreach activities, public lectures, and media campaigns aimed at promoting the value of girls' education, challenging stereotypes, and encouraging community support for women's educational aspirations.

**Parent and community engagement:** Involving parents, families, and community leaders in initiatives to promote girls' education can help create a supportive environment conducive to women's educational attainment. This can include sensitization workshops for parents, community meetings, and outreach programs aimed at promoting the importance of education for girls and garnering community support for gender equity in education.

By implementing these strategies in tandem, policymakers, educational institutions, and communities can work collaboratively to dismantle barriers to gender equity in higher education and create more inclusive learning environments where all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive and succeed.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there has been improvement in the higher education of women in Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts, but there are still issues that need to be resolved. Positive achievements are indicated by the creation of women's colleges and the rise in the





number of women enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate programmes. However, structural impediments, economic limitations, and deeply ingrained sociocultural norms still prevent women from participating in and gaining access to higher education. Gender gaps in school must be addressed immediately, as evidenced by the differences in literacy rates and the higher dropout rates among females (Jaysawal & Saha 2023). These differences directly result in women's reliance on males and their restricted chances for empowerment. The main driver of women's empowerment and the means of ending the cycle of exploitation and oppression appears to be education. The promotion of gender equity in higher education requires all-encompassing, multifaceted efforts. Institutional efforts like gender awareness programmes and mentorship opportunities can promote inclusive cultures, while policy actions like affirmative action and scholarships can assist reduce access hurdles. Community-based programmes, such as parent involvement and awareness campaigns, are equally important in questioning social norms and gaining support for women's goals to further their education. Stakeholders may work towards removing obstacles to gender equality in higher education and developing inclusive learning environments where women have equal opportunity to reach their full potential by putting these initiatives into practice together. In the end, promoting gender parity in higher education is essential for inclusive growth and sustainable development in the districts of Purba and Paschim Medinipur, as well as for social justice.

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