Gender Parity in Academia

Why in news?

True gender parity is when institutions consider women as assets rather than it being just a diversity rectification issue.

What is the picture of gender parity in academia?

- **Indian academia**- Gender discrimination in academia came under spotlight in India in 1933 when Kamala Sohonie approached Sir C.V. Raman to pursue research in physics under his guidance.
- The request was turned down on the ground that she was a woman and later she was admitted for 1 year on certain conditions.
- Similarly, in 1937, Professor D.M. Bose was reluctant to include Bibha Chowdhuri in his research group on the ground that he did not have suitable research projects to assign to women.
- She joined D.M. Bose's research group and her work on cosmic rays in determining the mass of mesons is legendary.
- **Global scenario**- In 2018, Prof. Alessandro Strumia claimed at a CERN workshop that physics was invented and built by men implying that women are less capable than men in physics research.
- CERN called the presentation highly offensive and suspended him.
- **Reasons for lower participation of women in R&D**- It includes familial issues like marriage, family responsibility, relocation due to transferable job of spouse etc.

What incentives are provided by the government?

- **GATI**- Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI) is a pilot project under the Department of Science and Technology to promote gender equity in S&T.
- **KIRAN**- Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN) is a plan to encourage women scientists in S&T and to prevent women scientists from giving up research.
- **Women Scientist Scheme-** WOS under KIRAN provides career opportunities including fellowships to unemployed women scientists and technologists, especially those who had a break in career, for pursuing research in frontier areas of science and engineering.
- **CURIE**- Under Consolidation of University Research through Innovation and Excellence in Women Universities (CURIE), only women Universities are being supported for development of research infrastructure and creation of state-of-the-art research laboratories.
- **Indo-US Fellowship**- It is for Women in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Medicine) to encourage Indian women scientists to undertake

international collaborative research in premier institutions in USA for duration of 3-6 months.

- **Vigyan Jyoti -** Vigyan Jyoti Scheme encourages girl students of Class 9 to 12 to pursue education and career in S&T.
- **SERB-POWER**- The SERB-POWER provides structured support in research to ensure equal access and weighted opportunities for Indian women scientists engaged in R&D activities.
- **The SERB Women Excellence Award** recognizes women Academy Awardees to expand their research horizon to higher levels.
- **BioCARe**- Department of Biotechnology is implementing Biotechnology Career Advancement and Re-orientation Programme (BioCARe) to encourage women scientists in Biotechnology research.
- To recognize the contribution of women scientists in the field of Earth System Sciences, Ministry of Earth Sciences has initiated a special award called "**National Award for woman scientist**".

What is India's position in academia?

The percentage of women in R&D is 16.6% among the total number of scientists working in science and technology organisations.

- **Women in STEM**- According to UNESCO data, India is at the lowest position, having only 14% female researchers working in STEM areas.
- In India, about 43% of women constitute the graduate population in STEM, which is one of the highest in the world, but only 14% of women join academic institutions and universities.
- **Women in research**- The participation of women in research has dropped significantly (27% female as compared to 73% male).
- **Women faculty**- The percentage of women in faculty positions begins to shrink with each step up the ladder.
- **Women in prestigious institutes**- According to a report published recently, the more prestigious the institute, the lower the number of women employees.
    - For example, in IIT Madras only 10.2% and in IIT Bombay only 17.5% are women.
- **Women in decision making**- The number of female participants in decision-making bodies such as the board of governors or council of institutes of higher education of repute is abysmally low.
    - Out of the 6 IIT established in 20th century, only IIT Kharagpur and IIT Delhi have women members on their governing body.
- **Female vice-chancellors**- According to a survey by the University Grants Commission, seven of the 54 central universities and 23 of the 419 private universities have female vice-chancellors.
- **Global picture**- Even developed countries have low women percentage - Japan 16% female researchers, the Netherlands 26%, the United States 27% and the United Kingdom 39%.
- Countries with a fairly good ratio in terms of an equal number of female and male researchers are South Africa and Egypt, with 45% female researchers each, and Cuba

at 49%.
- The highest number of female researchers are in Tunisia followed by Argentina and New Zealand.

How about women in corporate world?

- The number of women in senior management positions in the corporate sector in India is 39%, which is higher than the global average.
- Number of women CEOs in Fortune 500 companies is 15% while female board members in the management of private enterprises has been growing from 15% (2016) to 19.7% in 2022.
- If this trend continues, near parity will be reached by 2045, according to a forecast made by Deloitte.

What are the reasons for discrepancy in these two sectors?

- **Selection and promotion**- The mechanism of selection and promoting personnel in the private sector is mostly based on competence/merit because it is more market oriented than what it is in the academic institutes.
- **Schemes**- Encouraging the participation of women in the workforce in the private sector with the adoption of various schemes for women began long ago when compared to the government initiatives.
    - Flexi-hour worktime
    - Rejoining the workforce after an interim break
    - Sections operated only by women
- Gender parity will happen only when there is a change in mindset and institutions consider women as assets.

References

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/academia-research-and-the-glass-ceiling-in-india/article65839183.ece
2. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1694537

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering