

Mapping the Women's Voices in India: An Analysis

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Abstract

Women's studies as an interdisciplinary subject, focuses on the roles, experiences, and achievements of women in society. There has been tremendous growth in research, scholarship and action related works in the subject area of women's studies. This is to be made visible and the research trends are to be identified to decide upon and evaluate the focus of the subject. Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET), through their thesis and dissertation repository project named 'Shodhganga', provides a wonderful opportunity to identify the research trends in various subject areas, and 'women's studies' has been chosen as the scope of the present paper. A total of seven contributing universities, two general and five women universities, are chosen for the purpose. For these seven universities, all the PhD theses submitted for last five decades (since 1970's), relating to different women related issues are taken into consideration to map the research trend. The results show, that researches regarding women related issues have continuously increased and particularly in the new millennium the trend is experiencing almost an exponential growth. Almost 80% of the total theses in the subject area have been submitted after 2000 and the current decade i.e. 2011-17 is undoubtedly the most productive one. The subject area of 'Women Employment' and 'Women in Literature' has always dominated the field. The research areas got more diverse from 1990's and particularly in the new millennium newer fields are started to be explored.

Keywords: Women's Studies, Women's Movement, Women's Issues, Research Trend

1. Introduction

Women's studies is an interdisciplinary subject, which encompass academic courses in sociology, history, literature, and psychology. It focuses on the roles, experiences, and achievements of women in society. The leading and pioneering association in the field of women studies in India, Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) was registered as a membership-based organization in 1982 after the first National conference on Women's Studies in 1981. The Association's website says

“With women's studies being recognized as a politically significant activity in the quest for equality, some of the pioneers got together to organize the first National Conference on Women's Studies in 1981 at SNDT University, Mumbai. This historic conference viewed women's studies as a 'critical perspective' that needed to be integrated into all disciplines and recognized the need for universities to focus on the women's question through research, teaching and engagement in activities”. (IAWS). Fortunately, in India from the early 1980's different concepts and keywords pertaining to women's studies has been emerging. There has been tremendous growth in research,



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scholarship and in action related works in the subject area of women's studies as many of the leading universities and research organizations have included it into their course curriculum.

It has to be kept in mind that women's studies as a subject is not just mere academic exercise. Vyas and Singh (1993) have rightly pointed out that: "Women's Studies all over the world, and in India in particular, has been a long battle to shatter the invisibility of women's issues. Access to available information is the first step for this purpose". (Vyas and Singh, 1993). The research works being carried out in the subject area are to be made visible and the research trends are to be identified to decide upon and evaluate the focus of the subject.

Regarding visibility, Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) has initiated an excellent move through their theses and dissertations repository project named 'Shodhganga'. It provides a platform for researchers and scholars from Indian universities to upload their dissertations and PhD theses and make them available to the entire scholarly community through open access. It also provides the information science professionals a wonderful opportunity to identify the research trends in various subject areas, and 'women's studies' has been chosen as the scope of the present study accordingly.

In the present paper, an attempt has been made to map the women's voices in research themes adopted in the PhD theses uploaded till date to Shodhganga. A total of seven contributing universities are chosen for the purpose. Panjab University and Aligarh Muslim University are chosen as the general universities as they are the leading contributors to Shodhganga so far in terms of theses uploaded (6649

and 6458 respectively till 22nd April, 2017). Apart from that, five women universities viz. SNT Women's University, Avinashlingam University, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Mother Teresa Women's University and Karnataka State Women's University are also chosen to compare the research trends in women's universities in the target subject area with the same for the general universities and map the probable differences. For these seven universities, all the PhD theses submitted for last five decades (since 1970's) and uploaded to Shodhganga repository till date, relating to different women related issues are taken into consideration to map the research trend in the subject area.

2. Methodology

To describe and analyze the research trends related to women related issues a detailed account of all such PhD theses submitted to the seven considered universities since 1970's has been taken. The number of theses is subdivided on a decadal basis for all the universities and the decadal growth in PhD research in the subject area and the corresponding research trend has been observed through tables and graphs as represented in subsequent sections.

To identify the suitability of a thesis to be fit in the considered subject area of women's studies the keywords in thesis title are analyzed. About 19 different keywords have been identified from SEARS List of Subject Headings pertaining to broad subject area of women's studies. A brief description for each of those is presented in the subsequent section.

To understand the research scenario regarding women related issues more clearly, all the considered theses are further sub-categorized under these 19 keywords and the individual decadal trend for each of them has been analyzed graphically from Figure-

1 through Figure-4. Three analyses have been performed for each of the universities (women's universities are clubbed as a single one for convenience). Firstly the decadal growth rate of each of the keyword category has been prepared (Graph A). Secondly the percentage contribution of each keyword category in the total number of theses for each of the five decades has been prepared (Graph B). Thirdly the overall percentage contribution of a keyword category in the total number of women related PhD theses for particular a university is presented in terms of a pie-chart (Graph-C). The same analysis has been carried out taking all the theses for all the universities together to see the overall research trend in the subject area.

2.1 Subject Keywords Relating to Women Related Issues

A total of 19 different keywords have been identified from SEARS List of Subject Headings pertaining to broad subject area of women's studies. The latest (21st ed.) edition of SEARS includes more than two hundred and fifty new subject headings. New headings in this edition reflect the changing needs of library users. The keywords are described in brief subsequently.

❖ **Women-Employment (Women's Work):** The changing character of economy in the industrialized society made the contribution of women to newer fields of production. Increasingly large number of women began to leave their family and stepped out to gain economic independence. The issue of women's work in the form of economic contributions and their relationship to women's position in society, made a great impact on their decision making power. (Devi, 1982).

❖ **Women-Education:** During nineteenth-century India, the British kingdom proposed many reforms, and education was one of the items on reform agenda that contributed to the emancipation of women. Christian missionaries were pioneers in this field and they set up various schools. The first secular school was started By John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune (1801–1851) in Kolkata, in 1848. Literacy among women was appallingly low in 1920s. In 1921, 21 out of every 1000 women aged 10 years and over were literate. Fortunately as per 2011 census, the female literacy rate is 65.46%. (Basu and Ray, 1990).

❖ **Women-Health and Hygiene:** According to Dr. Flavia Bustreo, Assistant Director General for Family, Women's and Children's Health through the Life-course, World Health Organization (WHO), "We've come a long way since 1995- and it is time to celebrate women and their achievements. But it is also time to take stock of how women's rights are fulfilled in the world - especially the right to health. Twenty years after countries signed pledges in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, women still face many health problems and we must re-commit to addressing them." According to WHO, ten top issues for women's health are: Cancer, Reproductive Health, Maternal Health, HIV, Sexually Transmitted Infections, Violence against Women, Mental Health, Non-communicable Diseases, Being Young and Getting Older. All these issues are very much relevant to the Indian condition, where the sex ratio of India is only 943. (Census, 2011).

- ❖ **Women-Social Conditions:** This is a broad spectrum keyword, which more or less cater to every angles of women's status in society. In India, the publication of Towards Equality in 1974 by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974-5) laid the foundation for women's movement. The report proved to be an "eye opener" women's condition by talking about development and democracy from gender perspective. (Committee on the status of women in India, 1974-75).
- ❖ **Women in Literature:** As the SEARS List of Subject Headings (21st ed.) suggested, the theme of women in works of literature has been incorporated for this particular subject heading. SEARS have treated "Women authors" separately, but for the present work "women authors" have been included under "Women in literature", irrespective of literature of individual languages.
- ❖ **Women's Rights:** This subject heading is used for emancipation of women, Rights of women, Women-Civil rights, Women-Equal rights. To give a broader perspective, this paper also incorporated the legal status of women under this heading. Another notable missing is women's empowerment, which is very much relevant in today's Indian scenario, be it political, social or economical.
- ❖ **Adolescence:** As discussed earlier, the adolescent girls face a number of sexual and reproductive health challenges. This paper emphasized girls in relation to family, parent-child relationship, school environment, achievement stress, academic stress etc.
- ❖ **Child Psychology:** "Psychology is the science of the mind and behavior. The word "psychology" comes from the Greek word psyche meaning "breath, spirit, soul", and the Greek word logia meaning the study of something" Child psychology is an integral part of psychology which studies behaviour and the mind. In Indian family, motherhood and child rearing play a dominant role. A woman is often measured in terms of successful mothers, who balance her career and family very tactfully. This paper tried to incorporate the women's issues in relation to child development and child psychology. (Nordqvist, 2015)
- ❖ **Women-Mental Health:** Mental illness has long been treated as genderless problem. As result women with mental health problems suffered unnecessarily. But according to WHO, "Gender is a critical determinant of mental health and mental illness. The morbidity associated with mental illness has received substantially more attention than the gender specific determinants and mechanisms that promote and protect mental health and foster resilience to stress and adversity". This is the main reason for choosing this subject heading, and not including it under Women-Health and Hygiene. (World Health Organization (WHO)).
- ❖ **Muslim Women:** As per SEARS List of Subject Headings (21st ed.), Women-religious life can be divided geographically. And we also have Women in Christianity, Women in Islam, and we specially have Muslim women, but not Hindu women, instead we have Hindus, with a related term Hinduism. Since religious and social condition of Muslim women play a significant

role in our society, we categorically use this subject heading for this paper.

- ❖ **Women-History:** As SEARS List of Subject Headings (21st ed.) have suggested this particular subject heading deals with the history of women, their socio-economic, political, and legal position, their participation in historical events, and their contribution to society. In early 19th century, women occupied a very low status in Indian society, and the first man to speak publicly against social injustices and rituals is Raja Ram Mohun Roy. By the end of 19th century, women were gathering courage to challenge society, as well as their status. The Tagores of Bengal played a pioneering role at that time. As often said, it is “her-story” not “his-tory” only. (Basu and Ray, 1990).
- ❖ **Domestic Violence:** Violence against women is a major concern within the realm of women’s movement in India. There are many kinds of violence’s (physical and mental) within the family. Domestic violence relates to violent of aggressive behavior within the home.
- ❖ **Women in Development:** It includes role of women in overall development of the society, with special reference to India.
- ❖ **Women-Political Activity:** Through the ages, oppressed people in different parts of the world have fought for right to participate in the political process. Political participation determines the shape of political life. It has been considered by many political scientists as a means to development. The role of women in decision making process is hardly recognized, and this is very true for India also. “Women occupy just 66 seats in the 543 member Lok Sabha, which is a

mere 12%. The scenario for women Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) across all state assemblies in India is even worse, with the national average being a pitiable 9%. The best among them, Bihar, Rajasthan and Haryana have 14% representation while the worst states are Pondicherry and Nagaland, which have no women MLAs at all.” While the global average for women in parliament stands at 22.4%, India is at the 103 plays out of 140 countries with a mere 12% representation. (Rao, 2016).

- ❖ **Marriage/ Family:** In Indian context, the family is usually considered as a protective space which provides social and economic security, specially for women and children. During past few decades researches on women’s studies have gave emphasis on the power structure and gender discriminations within the family environment. It also focuses on the differences between the reality and ideology of the family. (Banerjee and Bagchi, 1995).
- ❖ **Social Classes:** This subject heading of SEARS is used for Change, Social; Cultural change and Social evolution. Number of theses have been found on marginalized classes which were important in Indian scenario. This particular subject heading’s broader terms are Caste and Sociology.
- ❖ **Reproduction:** This subject heading is specially chosen to put theses on Reproductive rights of women. There are two related terms: Reproductive system and Reproductive technology, but not reproductive rights. “My body, My decision” is an important slogan for women’s movement around the world.

❖ **Female Foeticide:** Gender seems to be one of the most dominant variables that influence human development from conception to death, particularly in Indian society. Apart from class, race, age, religion, and ethnicity, gender is another vital dimension of social stratification, putting the female at a level of disadvantage; though the scenario is changing at least in urban habitat. The Government of India has taken several legislative measures relating to issues from female foeticide, practice of child marriage, widow re-marriage to women's right to property etc., which have impacted the Indian family system and society in many ways. The twenty-first century witnessed huge changes in the Indian way of life under the influence of modernization, westernization, industrialization, technical advancement, and population mobility across the globe. However, the moment a baby is born the first thing that comes to mind is "boy or girl?" and the issue is beyond just the biological one. (Rao, Vidya and Sriramys, 2015).

❖ **Women's Movement :** Patel (Patel, 2010) in her article entitled "Women's Struggles & Women's Movement in India" said "Three phases of Women's Movements: 19th Century Social Reform Movement, 20th Century Freedom Movement and Women's Rights Movement in post 1975 period have brought to fore wide range of women's concerns" In India, women's movement is closely related with the discipline Women's studies. (Patel, 2010).

3. Trend of PhD Research Regarding Women Related Issues

The PhD theses covering different areas of women related researches carried out over last five decades in all the seven universities considered during the present study. It is done to understand the research trend regarding women related issues. Table-1 summarizes the growth in the number of PhD theses in the said areas over last five decades for all the considered universities.

Table 1: Trend of Growth of PhD Research Regarding Women Related Issues

Name of the University	Year Established	No. PhD Theses Regarding Women Related Issues					
		1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2017	Total
General Universities							
Aligarh Muslim University	1920	2	1	2	10	89	104
Panjab University	1947	9	13	24	44	17	107
Women's Universities							
SNDT Women's University	1916	-	6	15	7	6	34
Avinashlingam University	1957	-	-	-	8	23	31
Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam	1983	-	-	-	-	5	5
Mother Teresa Women's University	1984	-	-	-	-	53	53

Karnataka State Women’s University	2003	-	-	-	-	12	12
Women’s Universities Combined		-	6	15	15	99	135
All Universities Combined		11	20	41	69	205	346

[Source: Shodhganga: A Reservoir of Indian Theses]

The results show, that researches regarding women related issues have continuously increased particularly in the new millennium. Almost 80% of the of the total theses in the said area has been submitted after 2000 and the current decade i.e. 2011-17 is undoubtedly the most productive one for all the considered universities except Panjab University for which the most productive period has been 2001-2010.

To understand the research scenario regarding women related issues more clearly, the considered theses are further sub-categorized under 19 different keywords according to SEARS List of Subject Headings as described earlier. The research trends are observed, as represented in Figure-1 through Figure-4, for each of these keywords for all the considered universities. The five women’s universities are clubbed to represent the trend more conveniently.

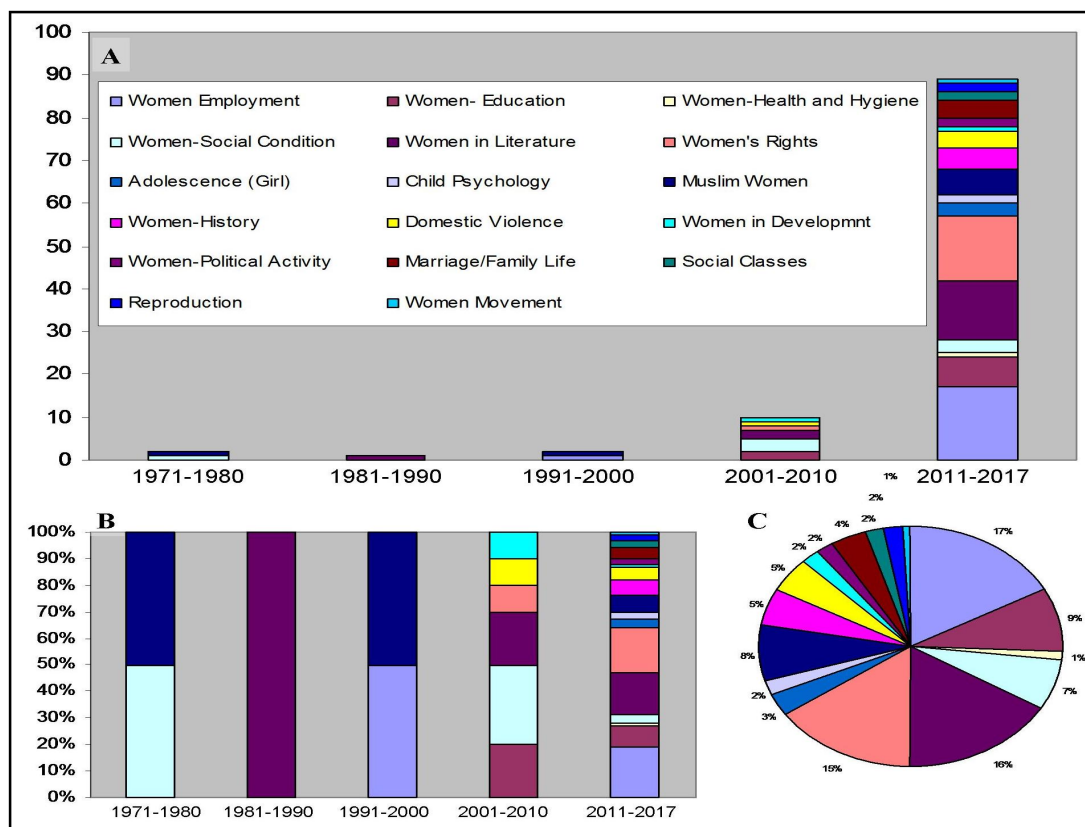


Figure 1: Research Trend Regarding Women Related Issues in Aligarh Muslim University

The research trend of Aligarh Muslim University as represented in Figure-1, clearly shows the huge increment of research activities regarding women related issues in the current decade over the past ones. It is interesting to see that after 2000, not only the number of researches in the said area has increased, but the said researches got diversified

into various keyword categories as well. The principal focus of research during 1970's was on social condition of women particularly the Muslim women. The overall focus of research in this university has radically shifted to women employment (17%), women in literature (16%) and women rights (15%) during last couple of decades.

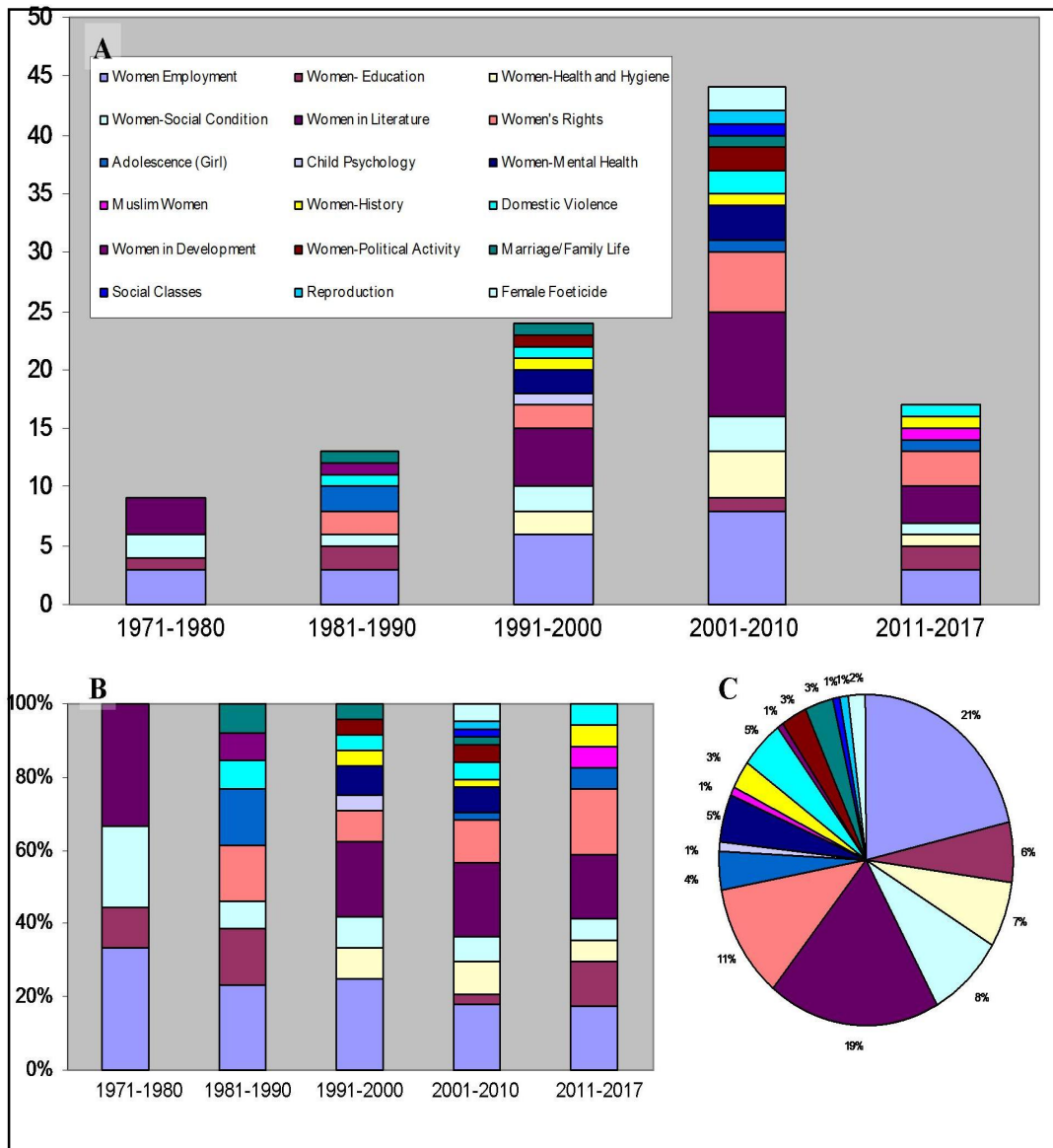


Figure 2: Research Trend Regarding Women Related Issues in Panjab University

More or less similar trend in women related researches is visible for Panjab University as represented in Figure-2, though more diversified in nature even from 1980's. The subject area of women

employment always shared the major percentage of researches for Panjab University. In this case too researches carried out in the field of women employment (21%), women in literature (19%) and women rights (11%) topped the overall list.

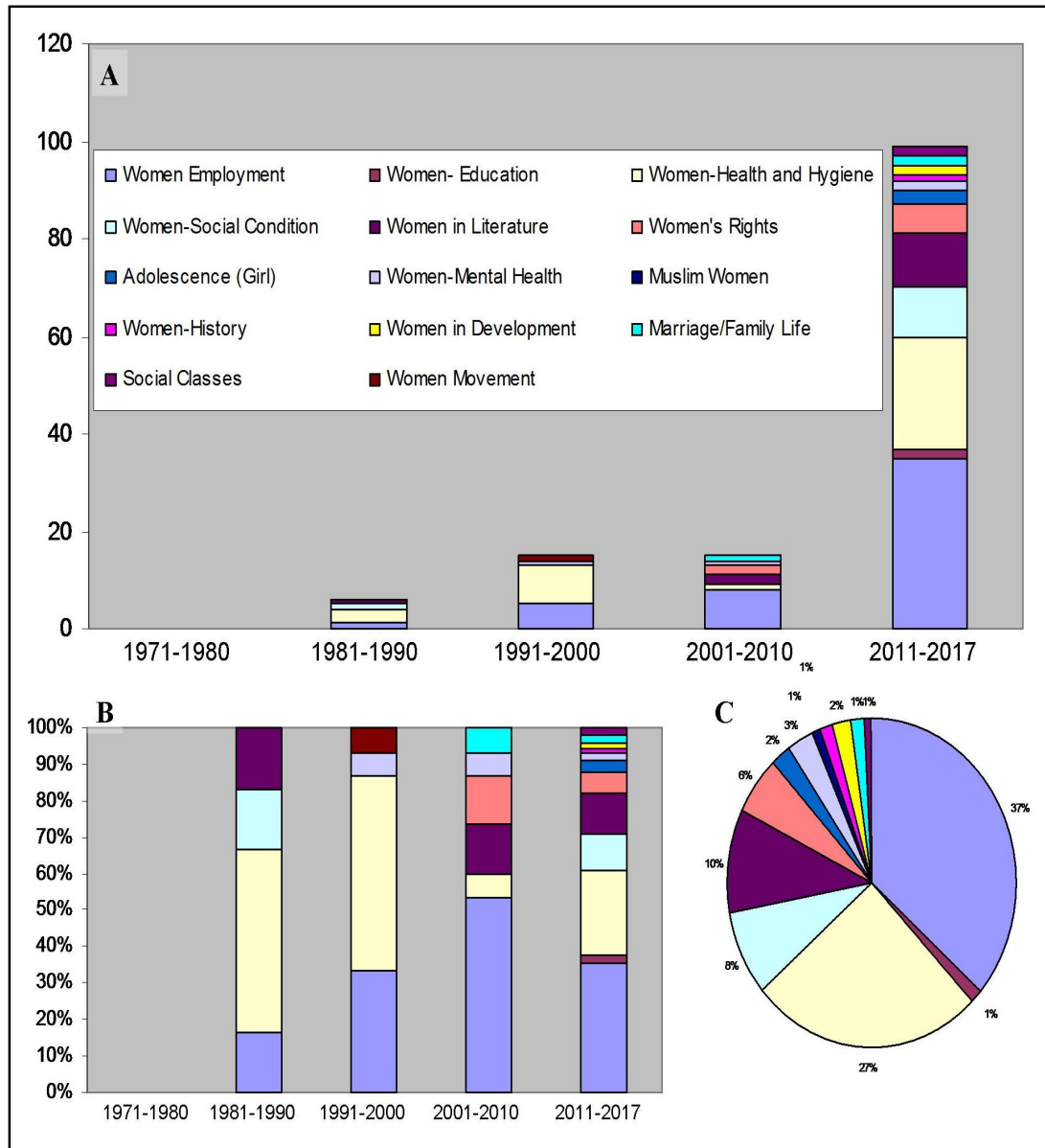


Figure 3: Research Trend Regarding Women Related Issues in Women's Universities

Like other universities, the subject area of women employment has dominated the research trend when women's universities are considered as shown in Figure-3. However a major shift is observed as women health and hygiene also has also been a major priority area starting from 1970's. In the overall list women health and hygiene is observed to be a close runner up (27%) to women employment (37%), women in literature (10%) being in the third place.

The researches regarding women related issues in universities are experiencing almost an exponential growth if one looks into the overall trend as

represented in Figure-4. The subject area of women employment and women in literature has always dominated the field. The research areas got more diverse from 1990's and particularly in the new millennium newer fields are started to be explored. An interesting shift came into actions as newer women's universities started to share their contribution particularly in the subject area of women health and hygiene. In the overall list the majority of researches regarding women employment is maintained (26%) followed by women in literature (15%), women health and hygiene (12%), women's rights (10%) and women's social condition (8%).

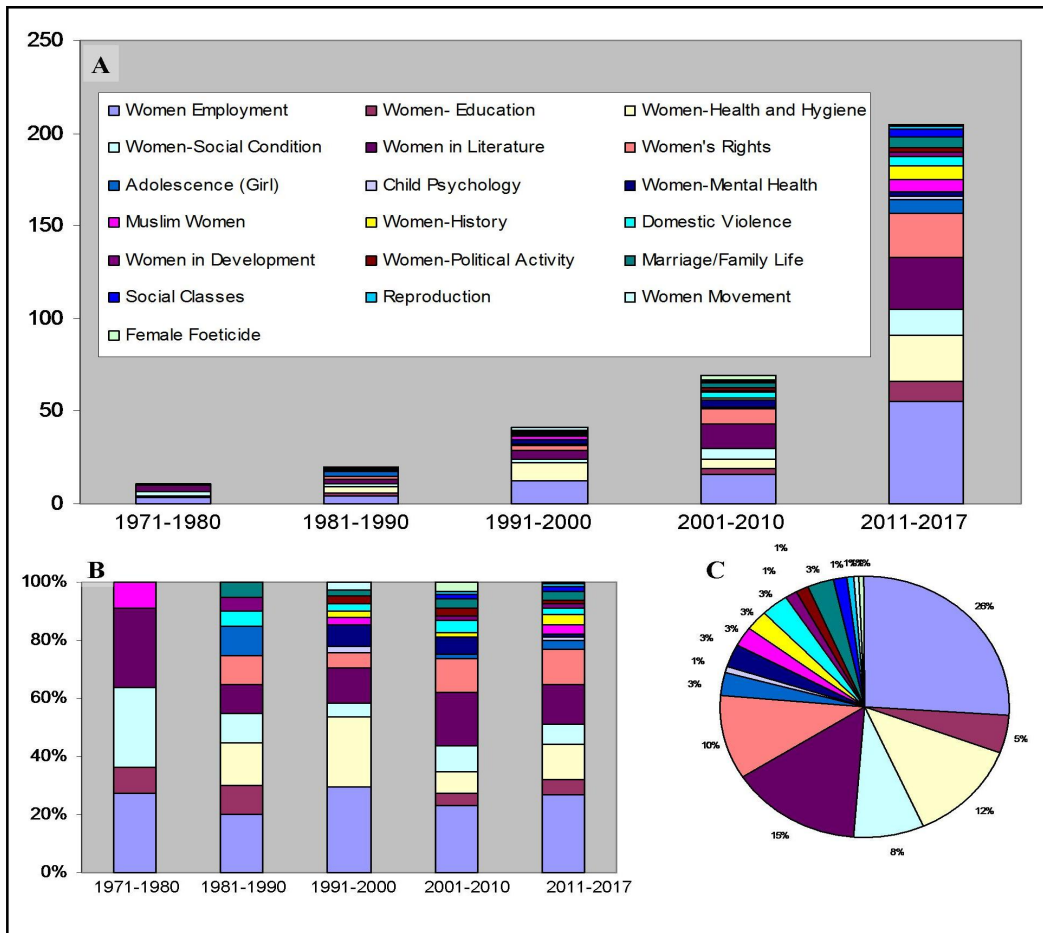


Figure 4: Research Trend Regarding Women Related Issues in Indian Universities

4. Conclusion

In the present paper, an attempt has been made to map the women's voices in research themes adopted in the PhD theses uploaded till date to Shodhganga from different Indian universities. A total of seven contributing universities, two general and five women's universities, are chosen for the purpose. For these seven universities, all the PhD theses submitted for last five decades (since 1970's), relating to different women related issues are taken into consideration to map the research trend in the subject area.

When subject wise trend for individual universities are observed, the topic of 'Women Employment' shared the major percentage of research for all the universities. For both of the general universities viz. Aligarh Muslim University and Panjab University, the topic of 'Women in Literature' and 'Women's Rights' followed the list. The research topics of Panjab University are observed to be more diverse than the same for Aligarh Muslim University. When results from the five women's universities are clubbed together the leading topic of 'Women Employment' is observed to be closely followed by the topic of 'Women Health and Hygiene' shifting the topic of 'Women in Literature' to the third place. The diversity of research topics is also notable for women's universities.

The results show, that researches regarding women related issues have continuously increased particularly in the new millennium. The researches regarding women related issues in Indian universities are experiencing almost an exponential growth in recent years. Almost 80% of the total theses in the subject area have been submitted after 2000 and the current decade i.e. 2011-17 is

undoubtedly the most productive one. The research areas got more diverse from 1990's and particularly in the new millennium newer fields are started to be explored. It is expected that the growing trend of researches regarding women related issues will continue and the subject of Women's Studies will be able to find newer dimensions in future.

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