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**Open and Distance Learning for Empowering Women through  
Science Teaching: The Performance and Promise of Open and  
Distance Education in West Bengal, India**

**Kajal De\* & Soumita Dutta\*\***

\* *Professor of Mathematics & Director School of Sciences, Netaji Subhas Open University, Kolkata.*

\*\**Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development, J. D. Birla Institute, Kolkata*

**ABSTRACT**

*Education is a panacea to make women the first, the prior and not the Second Sex. Educational achievement guarantees a better social and economic life for women. Legal and Constitutional provisions cannot efface women subjugation in totality. Traditional institutional factors often contrive to exclude women from participating in higher education. Science Education offered by traditional educational institutions often goes out of reach for women learners. For Traditional Universities attendances are compulsory in science subjects, as it is not only theory but includes substantial experimental and observational activity. Open University keeping the students prior commitments in mind tries to solve theories by Self Learning Material and essential practical activities through Personal Contact Program. This paper would try to study the level to which Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU), a State Open University has been socially responsible in catering science education for women learners in West Bengal. Keeping the results in mind, the paper would try to point towards some future attempts, if adopted by open and distance learning might help to develop positive attitude among women learners towards distance learning and enchanting towards science subjects.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Acquisition of knowledge or education plays a catalytic role in a country's socio-economic development and is one of the principal means available for a deeper and harmonious form of human development reducing poverty, nescience and exclusion. Access to education should be available to both men and women as it provides an end in itself as well as a means of realizing other desirable ends. Parity in education at the primary level has increased significantly in most parts of the world but girls' participation rates decline at the secondary level in many regions <sup>(11)</sup>. Boys and girls are relatively equal in health, education and developmental outcomes during their early childhood but disadvantages mount for girls during child-bearing age. In developing countries girls are likely to be married off and take the responsibility of childbearing during adolescence. One-third of girls in the developing world are married before age 18, and one-third of women in the developing world give birth before age 20 <sup>(12)</sup>. According to UNICEF (2012) West Bengal has the sixth highest incidence of child marriage in India with 54.8% children married before 18 years. In this State, at least one in two currently married women in age group 20-24 years happens to be a child bride. Responsibilities of marriage and childbearing tend women to fall behind in higher education